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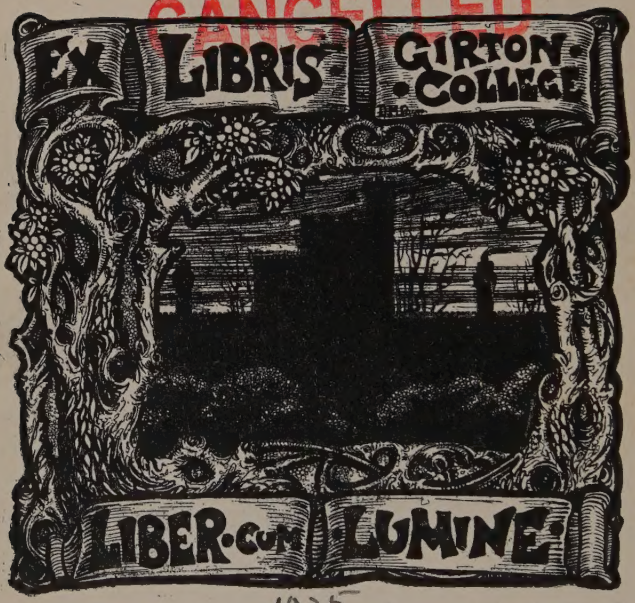

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THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

JOHN S. CARROLL, M.A., D.D.

AUTHOR OF 'EXILES OF ETERNITY,' 'PRISONERS OF HOPE,' 'IN PATRIA,' EXPOSITIONS OF THE 'DIVINA COMMEDIA'; 'THE LOOMS OF THE GODS,' ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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TO THE MEMORY OF

JOHN AND KATHARINE CARROLL

FATHER AND MOTHER OF THE AUTHOR

'TENDEBANTQUE MANUS RIPAE
ULTERIORIS AMORE'

I WISH to express my regret that, owing to lack of space, many must be disappointed who had requested the inclusion in this volume of special sermons which they believed had influenced their lives. If this present work is felt to supply a real want, it may yet be possible to follow with a further selection of sermons. Again, many Churchmen and others think that certain courses of lectures, notably on the life of Christ, St. John's Gospel, and the Apostles' Creed, would, if published, be of great spiritual value in this age of doubt, coming as they do from the pen of one who passed through a period of religious uncertainty to a sure and confident faith. But all this lies with the future.

I sincerely thank the Rev. P. D. Thomson, D.D., himself an eloquent preacher whose services to the Church are widely appreciated, for his help in connection with this publication. It seems fitting that one for whom my father had a true affection should pay this tribute to his memory. In acknow-

ledging Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton's unfailing courtesy and kindness towards his work, I feel I am fulfilling what would have been the author's wish.

KATHLEEN MARY CARROLL.

INNISFAIL, NEWLANDS,
GLASGOW, *June* 1925.

To the students of progressive religious thought in Scotland for over forty years, and to the Church in Scotland generally, a volume from the pen of John S. Carroll, late of St. John's United Free Church, Glasgow, needs no introduction. They will give it an eager welcome, as will many, not primarily identified with any Church, but earnest seekers after truth and 'pilgrims in the region of faith,' who found in his preaching relief of doubt and light for their pilgrim-way.

This introduction is addressed to a wider audience than these: the membership of all the Churches and as many as are seeking fuller light on the things of God and the soul, in the hope that they may find in the printed page what so many found in the spoken word—the inspiration of a singularly sensitive and suggestive mind and of a profoundly deep-seeing Christian spirit, to which narrowness and sectarianism were alien.

The publication of Dr. Carroll's three great volumes on the *Divina Commedia—Exiles of Eternity*, *Prisoners of Hope*, and *In Patria*, the first of which has recently been republished for the fourth time—placed him forthwith in the front rank of Dante

scholars; but long before these masterpieces of exposition were given to the world, he was recognised as one of the most original and outstanding preachers of the Scottish pulpit. The same qualities which made him a supreme interpreter of Dante made him also a superb expositor of the New Testament.

He was indeed a preacher's preacher, a student's guide to the heart of Scriptural truth, a true Virgil to minds seeking light and leading in the mysteries of the Faith. For that reason his audience in St. John's, where he worked in succession to some of the most eminent Scottish ministers of their day —Chalmers, Brown, Roxburgh, Whyte (later 'of St. George's'), Cameron — usually contained a number of professors, ministers, students, and laymen from far and near, distinguished in various walks of life, who frequently came to sit at the feet of one singularly gifted and inspired.

Yet it was not to such as these alone that he appealed. Ordinary, hard-working men and women found in his preaching a rare spiritual quality and power. The North Country fishers and farmers of his first charge grudged almost fiercely to the great city one who had raised them from a state bordering on spiritual despair. The working-folk of St. John's big Mission, far in the East End of Glasgow, were never happier than when 'the minister himself' came to speak to them.

For he had the gift of reaching learned and simple alike by the depth and simplicity of his teaching. The difficult became easy and the obscure luminous ; the hackneyed and commonplace was clothed with freshness and beauty ; all that he touched was enriched with the grace of a noble mind and sensitive spirit ; and, like the householder in the parable of our Lord, being ' instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven,' he ' brought forth out of his treasures things new and old.'

The sermons in this volume are characteristic, but do not aim at being exhaustive of the style and substance of his preaching. They are such as might have been heard from him any Sunday, and they cover the whole of his ministry from his earliest period to the last sermon he preached in St. John's, the Memorial Sermon ' to the Faithful in the Great War.' Those who loved him and his preaching will prefer it so ; and so only is it possible to convey to those who did not know him a touch of his stately and gracious personality — a touch, and nothing more. For with him it is even more impossible than usual to convey anything of the impression of his presence—the finely chiselled features, the grandly-moulded head, the kingly bearing, the quiet, impressive tones, the whole spiritual quality and force of the man. Least of all is it possible to reproduce the closing passage of each sermon, when the manuscript was laid aside, the Bible

closed, and the preacher rose to the height, not only of his art, but of his calling, as he summarised the salient points of his discourse and fused it into one glowing message and appeal, while his hearers sat breathless and spell-bound, rapt in the spirit and at home for the moment amid things unseen and eternal. There was no conscious art in it. It was all perfectly simple and natural, quiet, but always intense and sometimes impassioned, the fusing of the whole man in his message, the projection of a profoundly spiritual mind into the souls of his audience. Such an experience was unforgettable. It was to stand in the Presence of God, whether 'in the body or out of the body,' to be 'caught up into the third heaven,' and to see for a moment the Beatific Vision.

The preparation of this volume for the Press has been done mainly by his daughter, Kathleen Mary, who collaborated with her father in literary work, entered fully into his mind, and shared his plans for future publication. Unhappily, he was not spared to bring those plans to fruition, but he left behind certain material, partly finished, partly in notes, which those who knew his artistic and creative gifts will hope may one day see the light. For he was poet, artist, and man of letters as well as preacher—only, those gifts were consecrated to the supreme duty of his calling. He knew the history of Christian thought from the Early Fathers and

the Early Celtic Church through the Mediaeval Schoolmen down to modern Evangelical teaching and the Higher Criticism, yet his message at the end of life, as at the beginning, was 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' But his interests were many-sided. He often delivered lectures on literature and art which show the same intellectual and spiritual insight as does every page of his great work on Dante. These, if published, would be a revelation of the deep Christian teaching to be found in the work of many great poets and painters, British and foreign, ancient and modern.

But it was only in later years that he permitted himself the joy of creative work. If it bear comparison with his expository genius, it should find a place among the finest products of contemporary literature.

Meanwhile, this volume of sermons is sent forth in response to the desire of many who owe a deep spiritual debt to their author, and in the hope that many others who never heard him may find in them something of that spiritual surprise and satisfaction which those who knew and loved him will always associate with 'Carroll of St. John's.'

P. D. THOMSON.

KELVINSIDE,
GLASGOW, *May* 1925.

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The Motherhood of God

'As one' (lit. a man) 'whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.'—ISAIAH lxvi. 13.

I WISH to speak this morning of the Motherhood of God. All the right and natural relationships in which human beings stand to each other are meant to reveal something in God—some relation in which He stands to us. He is as a king to His subjects, giving them laws and governing them for their good. He is as a Father to His children, providing for their wants, training and educating them in love and service as members of the great family of mankind. But there is something, if one may say so, deeper than even this—something that corresponds to the tenderness of a mother, especially in her gentle power of comforting the weary and wounded spirit of her child. And the prophet is not thinking of a little child, but of the grown man. His words are: 'As a man whom his mother comforteth'—the grown man, heart-sore and broken, fleeing back as in his childish sorrows to the comfort of his mother's presence. There is something in God which corresponds to that power of tender mother-comfort, something of which, indeed, that mother-comfort is only the pale, earthly reflection. The Jews have a saying, beautiful even

in the appearance of limitation which it lays on God : 'God could not be everywhere, and so He made mothers.' They are His tenderest image in humanity.

Now, the very quality of the comfort we seek from God depends on our thought of Him. To many in trouble He is nothing more than a tower into which they run for safety—an island on which they are flung shipwrecked by the storms of life—a tower and an island from which they will depart when the storm blows by, and forget till it breaks out afresh. Now, this must be a quite different spiritual quality of comfort from that of turning to God as to a mother. Try to think how close to God that brings us. Here is a man weary and broken, out in the pitiless world. It matters, in one sense, comparatively little what has gone against him : his fortunes are ruined, his dearest have passed into darkness, his faith has given way beneath his feet, the net of his own sins has caught him in some terrible entanglement. In such dark and anguished hours nothing is more pathetic than the way in which the heart longs to retreat to the mother that gave it being. There rises up the little corner of mother-earth, the fields in which he played as a merry boy, the old home, the little room, and the mother who came every night to see that all was right. What would he not give to be the happy, innocent boy again and feel her arms around him and her kiss upon his brow ? And sometimes he does feel it. Sometimes there seems nothing left but to creep home like a wounded animal, and cast

himself upon the mother-love from which he came at first. I say the mother-love from which he came —for this is the central heart of all his comfort : it is to no stranger he is coming ; it is to the fountain of his being, and the very thought is comfort. And just this is the comfort the Divine Mother gives. We come to God in some distress of life, and the comfort is that we come to no stranger on whom we have no claim and who may turn in wonder and ask why we came. We come to the Eternal Mother—the source of our being—the ancient home to which we belong. The very thought that this is so is the first great comfort—merely to think of the mother-love of God is itself a consolation. Then follow this comfort a step further. To a woman with the true mother-heart, her child never really grows up ; he is always the little child that was laid upon her breast. He may pass out and mingle with the world, may come to honour or disgrace—it matters nothing. Behind it all there moves in the mother's imagination the little form that clung to her hand, and knelt at her knee, and lisped her words, and ran to her for comfort. And it is the memory of all this which makes the mother-comfort in the after years. The grown man, broken with the battle of life or his own sins, comes and casts himself once more at his mother's knee ; but it is not the grown man she sees. What does it matter what he is now ?—to her he is the child, weak, foolish, inexperienced, erring, but only the more therefore to be pitied and comforted. And thus to God we are never anything but little chil-

dren ; He has a mother's pity on our weakness and folly and suffering. He makes allowance for us—His own heart pleads for us. You may remember Coventry Patmore's poem, 'The Toys.' The poet tells how he punished his little son for disobedience, 'His Mother, who was patient, being dead' ; and how, fearing lest 'grief should hinder sleep,' he visited the child's bedside, only to find him sound asleep, his lashes wet with tears :

> 'And I, with moan,
> Kissing away his tears, left others of my own ;
> For, on a table drawn beside his head,
> He had put, within his reach,
> A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
> A piece of glass abraded by the beach
> And six or seven shells,
> A bottle with bluebells
> And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
> To comfort his sad heart.'

And that night the human father, touched to the soul, prayed to the Divine Father :

> 'Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,
> Not vexing Thee in death,
> And Thou rememberest of what toys
> We made our joys,
> How weakly understood,
> Thy great commanded good,
> Then, fatherly not less
> Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
> Thou 'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
> "I will be sorry for their childishness."'

The poet says 'fatherly'—in reality it is more the *motherly* quality of compassion. God comforts as a mother just because He never forgets that we are but children, needing a mother's infinite patience with our ignorance, waywardness, and sin.

And, further, we are received without any questions asked. A mother, when her son flees to her in distress, does not really ask questions. Others may demand, not unnaturally, to know this or that before help is given; but a mother's love asks nothing. It is enough to know that he is in distress —she may guess much and fear more, but the need for comfort comes first, and the knowledge can wait. There is something of this in the Motherhood of God. He will not probe the wound when He has power to heal it. There is surely something very tender and beautiful in this motherly comfort of God which asks no questions, demands no explanations, utters no reproach, but says simply, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' How easy it ought to make it to carry our sorrows to Him, just to know that 'as one whom his mother comforteth,' so God comforts us—with the same motherly tenderness and reticence, the same unwillingness to touch the wound or draw aside the veil from the hidden grief or shame!

There is one other quality in this mother-comfort which I may call its inarticulateness. The word is not a good one, perhaps, but the thing itself is easily understood. A little child, overwhelmed with some pain or grief, runs to its mother for com-

fort, and what comfort does it get? As a rule, none that can be put in words—no definite explanation. Words and explanations might but increase the child's grief. Mothers are wiser. They catch up the weeping child to their breast, bend face upon face, croon over it pet names and baby words, until it is comforted by the mere presence, the enfolding nearness, the instinctive, penetrating sense of love. It is often so that even the grown man is comforted by his mother. She breaks out over the bowed head into the old baby names, the old childish words of endearment—till old feelings revive and he is folded into her personal nearness and love, away from his sorrows—or if not away from them, at all events the sorrows themselves are as it were enveloped in the love and the personal presence, and the poignant pain of them is dulled. It is not anything the mother has said—it is simply herself. The comfort, like the grief, is inarticulate. And often just so, with this strange inarticulate mother-comfort, God comforts. A man carries his trouble to God, some torturing doubt, some worldly loss, some wound of the heart, some ruin of sin within the soul. And God comforts, indeed, but with no definite words or thoughts. The doubt is not cleared up, the loss, the wound, even the sin, seem to remain—and yet the sufferer is comforted; nay, comforted more deeply. For a few words spoken, or a quick and easy release, might make God Himself seem unimportant and unnecessary. But instead, God comforts as a mother. He lifts His troubled child into the everlasting arms; He

folds silently round it the deep sense of Himself, of His nearness, and love, and care ; so that nothing more is needed—the heart is comforted, it knows not how. You perhaps think this vague and unreal, but it is never so to the soul that feels it. There are, indeed, other forms of Divine comfort more definite and intelligible. But this is, 'as one whom his mother comforteth'—deeper than words and forms —the silent, enfolding presence of the mother round the child, which makes all trouble easier to bear.

When we go to God, therefore, we go to the eternal Mother-heart to which we belong, from which we came ; we go to One Who always thinks of us as little children to be patiently borne with ; to One Who asks no questions and strikes no wound ; to One Who folds us into His own presence, and by His very nearness comforts. That is our God, with all the tenderness of a mother within His breast. It is strange to think that we will seek our comfort almost anywhere else than in the Mother-love from which we came. We seek escape from our sorrows in the lapse of time or change of surroundings, in harder work or more eager pleasure, in the distractions of sin, dissipation, excitement ; while all the time there stands open to every sufferer the Motherhood of God, eager to give the peace which passeth understanding, to fold us with all our sins and sorrows into the very being of the Eternal Himself as revealed by One Who said, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !'

'For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.'—ROMANS viii. 22.

LET us admit that it is doubtful if any solution of the problem of pain is possible in our present stage of evolution: pain seems to be part of the general mystery of a universe which is too great for us to understand in our few years. We seem to hear the voice which Job heard out of the whirlwind, 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?'—there was no other answer to the complaints of the sufferer.

One thing, however, is sure: insensibility to the world's pain is the sign of a low and bounded nature. The suffering around us often seems unbearable: 'we hide, as it were, our faces from it.' But Science forces us to realise the struggle for existence in both the animal and the human world. Christianity has quickened our unselfish powers. The tides of human pain and passion flow through many a heart. Some are almost overwhelmed by an agony of intolerable wrong: it seems to generous hearts that the innocent are swept down more inexorably than the guilty. And God sits silent, behind the veil—not, to quote words of Frederick Myers, 'coldly sublime, intolerably just,' but

'coldly sublime, intolerably *un*just'—for the final sting of pain is this unbearable suspicion of the justice of God.

And this is what for many years I have felt to be the heart of the problem : is God the author of all this pain that darkens the sunshine? Apologists usually assume that He is, and undoubtedly, being omniscient, He created the universe with perfect knowledge of the future suffering. But He did not create that suffering. To imagine it any part of His original purpose is simply to give up the conception of a good God—that is, of a God at all, for an evil God is a contradiction in terms. And therefore, after considering for years the various speculations, my mind has become finally convinced that the old Scriptural view has the fewest difficulties. It is repudiated by theologians of many schools, but I am content to be on the other side with the Apostle Paul, who says, 'The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it,'—not God, but man by his sin—'in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.' We may reject or accept this passage, but the meaning is clear. The creation is subject to vanity—resultlessness ; it is in bondage to decay ; but this is the terrible issue of a violation of the Divine purpose,

whether here or elsewhere ; perhaps—if Science has spoken its last word—necessitating a long, painful process of evolution, at some point in which something happened, symbolised perhaps by the story of the Apple, which gave the newly evolved soul the chance of choosing what its bias would be. However it came about, man, ' the roof and crown of things,' broke away from God, and his rebellion sent a dislocation through the whole system of Nature ; so that Nature, while retaining much of its Divine origin, is, in its decay and suffering, a great mirror in which man may see the image of his own evil.

Yet even this suffering is a travail which is bringing a new world to the birth—and the birth draws near in proportion as the revealing of the Sons of God draws near, as human nature recovers from its moral evil and attains to its true Divine origin. As for the lives lost in the long, sad process, we must trust to God to compensate somehow and somewhere the humblest of His creatures. Man and Nature form a unity, and Nature rises and falls with him who is its head. If that is true, we must shift the blame from God to ourselves.

This view has, I admit, many difficulties. Geology reveals the sufferings of the animals long before man appeared. The American theologian, Bushnell, explains this as ' anticipative consequences.' A governor of a state, for instance, may erect a prison before ever a crime is committed. So God anticipated man's sin by preparing a world which would be a school of discipline. How far that

relieves the difficulty it is hard to say; but the alternative seems to be to blame God for everything instead of for this geologic fragment only. If we say it is not just to hang the destiny of Nature on man's good behaviour, it may be that in no other way could a universe be created at all. To build it in water-tight compartments, so that evil results could be confined to one part, would be perhaps to ruin the unity essential to the very existence of a universe. Perhaps, also, when we see the

> 'one far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves,'

we may see that 'the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,' and in the new creation that waited for our revealing. And even if evil be, as modernists say, only good in the making, we have the same idea of an imperfect world working painfully to a state of perfection.

And on this basis that the world is not as its Creator meant it to be, I hope to show that the pain is limited as far as may be; that it is utilised for the driving back of evil; and that God is Himself the greatest sufferer. Let us remember that pleasure and pain are polar forces. When we demand a world without pain, we may be asking for the removal of pleasure as we know it, which may have been given as compensation for the pain which entered through sin into the universe. The same faculties that are capable of pain are capable of pleasure.

Next, many pains are automatic danger-signals, without which we would mutilate or kill ourselves without knowing it. 'The burnt child dreads the fire'; but for the pain, it would probably burn its fingers off. Martineau says, 'Reason itself, were it universal, would be a poor substitute for this sharp reminder. If each creature had to study its own case, and, like an outside physician, prescribe its diet and its meals, where to rest, and how and where to build, how long would it be before it slipped into some fatal forgetfulness, like the patient kept alive by art, and blundering among his medicines?' Take from human beings the sharp pain of hunger, and, the necessity of work being gone, the discipline of work would go with it. The pain of hunger may, indeed, destroy instead of preserving; but that is almost invariably when some moral wrong deprives the hungry of the necessary food—their own wrong-doing, or the injustice of their neighbours.

Turn to the sufferings of the animals. The Cartesian school held that animals, having no souls, are mere automata, which go through the outward forms of pain, yet feel none. It is difficult to think how intellectual men could thus delude themselves. Yet we should remember the alleviations of their sufferings. Among men, memory and anticipation create an imaginative world of pain unknown to the lower animals. You remember how Burns felt the contrast when his plough turned the mouse out of her nest:

'Still thou art blest, compared wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But, och! I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!'

Or we may comfort ourselves with the idea that animals of prey so fascinate their victims at the moment of capture that they feel no pain. Livingstone, in his *Journeys*, tells us that he felt none in a lion's grasp. 'The shock produced a stupor similar to that which seems to be felt by a mouse after the first shake of the cat. . . . This peculiar state is probably produced in all animals killed by the carnivora; and if so, is a merciful provision by our benevolent Creator for lessening the pain of death.' Again, the struggle for existence tends to bring the animal nearer perfection—giving swiftness, strength, quickness of the senses. And we must remember that very many of the sufferings of the animals come from the cruelty of man. Vivisection, for instance, is the exploitation, mistaken, according to many doctors, of the animal world. One hears of scientific means by which the power of movement is paralysed, while the power of feeling pain is as keen as before. Doubtless many vivisectionists violate their own feelings in the sincere hope of benefiting humanity, but the idea of obtaining good through evil is just what constitutes temptation. We do evil because we imagine that from it will come good, or at least pleasure of some sort, to ourselves or others. When we sin to

benefit others, it is Satan transforming himself into an angel of light. Surely we should be chivalrous enough not to wish to benefit by the miseries of helpless creatures which man, as head of the universe, is bound in honour to protect. Let us not forget to reverence all that lives, remembering that 'All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.' But He did not make them for the vivisectionist's knife. If St. Paul's view is true, human evil is, in some sense, at the root of all suffering. There is something strangely pathetic in the thought that the suffering of the animals is one of the dark shadows cast by human sin—something that may well appeal to us to lighten the darkness by kindness and love, and, in Wordsworth's words,

> 'Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that lives.'

Finally, the deliberate opinion of the great naturalist, Dr. Russel Wallace, is that 'animals in a state of nature have an almost perpetual enjoyment in their lives.' 'Given the necessity of death and reproduction—and without these there could have been no progressive development in the natural world—it is difficult even to imagine a system by which a greater balance of happiness could have been secured.' And of the struggle for existence he says, 'It brings the maximum of life and enjoyment with the minimum of suffering.'

In the human world the problem deepens. To us, as to the animals, 'painful sensations,' to quote

Le Conte, 'are only watchful vedettes upon the outposts of our organism to warn us of approaching danger. Without these, the citadel of our life would be quickly surprised and taken.' But in man there enters in the moral element of pain. However we may account for it, all experience shows that nothing refines character like suffering—when nobly borne: for when taken in a base spirit, it but makes more base. No man has ever touched the world to fine issues who has not himself passed through the fire. 'Ease and prosperity,' says Martineau, 'may supply a sufficient school for the respectable *commoners* in character: but "without suffering is no man *ennobled*." Every highest form of excellence, personal, relative, spiritual, rises from this dark ground, and emerges into its freedom by the conquest of some severe necessity. In what Elysium could you find the sweet patience and silent self-control of which every nurse can testify? or the fortitude in right, which the rack cannot crush or the dungeon wear out? or the courage of the prophet, to fling his divine word before the wrath of princes and the mocking of the people?' Thus suffering ennobles the sufferer. But it also teaches those around him the sympathetic virtues, patience, sympathy, compassion. It seems strange that the most beautiful qualities of human nature are ones which would scarcely need to exist, but for the misery and imperfection of the world. Certain it is that the principle, 'strength is made perfect in weakness,' underlies everything.

Very often, again, suffering is simply the punish-

ment for wrong-doing. Penalty is the reaction of the nature of things against its own violation. If we could trace the origin of all pain, disease, want, hunger, rags, melancholy, restlessness, discontent, insanity, we would find that by far the greater part came from moral wrong-doing somewhere—from the inhumanity of man to man. And it is just here that the true problem begins. If we saw the sinner himself punished, our conscience could not but approve. But faith in Divine justice receives a shock when the suffering overflows to the innocent life from the guilty. Let us look at it in its most acute form. It seems a terrible injustice that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children. Why is not each individual made to stand by himself—to receive the good or evil he has personally deserved? Think, however, what this would mean on the good side. How much of good have any of us earned by our own personal merits? Our whole life has come to us from the earnings of others—social law and order, knowledge, science, art, education, ethical ideas, and great religious conceptions: whence did these come if not from that constitution of society which we call heredity? If you and I were condemned to possess nothing, mental, moral, spiritual, but what we personally earned and deserved, we would at one stroke lose that vast and unspeakable heritage. If the hereditary constitution of our race convey blessings for right conduct, it cannot but convey the opposite for wrong conduct. And it gives an awful weight and responsibility to the individual life when we

see that it is so much more than individual—that it sends its good and evil far into the generations to come. How far? There is one word of great hope: 'visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the *third* and *fourth* generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto *thousands*' (that is, of generations) 'of them that love me and keep my commandments.' God puts a limit on hereditary sin—it tends to die out in a few generations; whereas goodness gives vitality to a thousand generations—it has 'the power of an endless life.' We see at least that heredity works in the direction of righteousness and blessing.

Many a mystery doubtless remains—as, for instance, the ultimate fate of those who seem to be mere victims of this hereditary system. Perhaps those who have every advantage of heredity and training will be more severely judged for some slight meanness than these poor victims for what we count great sins. As Francis Thompson says:

> 'Heaven . . .
> . . . .
> Must of as deep diversity
> In judgement as creation be.'

But there is no final comfort save in the very being of God. The most important statement that can be made is that God is the greatest sufferer—that He takes on His own heart the heaviest burden. Without this, the central meaning of the Christian faith, 'the riddle of the painful earth,' is insoluble. If God made this world, foreknowing all the sin and

suffering, and tossed it forth on its sad career, while He sat in undisturbed felicity, He would deserve our scorn and hatred. But he that hath seen Christ hanging on the Cross, bearing the sin and suffering of the world, hath seen what the Father was doing all the time, is ever doing. 'The Lamb was slain,' not simply some nineteen hundred years ago, but 'from the foundation of the world.' Having made it, He would see it through the great adventure—would shrink from nothing to bring the whole creation into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. That is the meaning of Love—Love suffers for those it loves. Suffers, yet is happy; not to be allowed to suffer would be the unhappiness. Philosophers deny that God can suffer. They are right, in a beautiful way of which they do not dream. Even among ourselves perfect love transmutes suffering into perfect joy—as you must know if you have ever suffered nobly for the sake of one you deeply loved. When we seek happiness for ourselves alone, the pleasure has a secret core of pain, restlessness, discontent. When Love carries us into suffering for others, it is joy, in proportion as the Love was deep and pure. And so when you get infinite Love, you may get infinite suffering, and the suffering will be infinite peace and joy. And that is God, and He is Himself the solution of the problem of pain. He is solving it by bearing it, and by winning over one here and one there to share with Him that strange blessedness. Take your share in the world's sorrow as God takes it in the joy of Love, and the meaning of the problem of pain will become clear.

It is the mere spectator who moans. Therefore, if some personal pain comes to you, remember it is your chance of passing from the show of life to the reality.

> 'Grief should be
> Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate,
> Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free;
> Strong to consume small troubles; to commend
> Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end.'

And if life offer you opportunities of suffering for the good of others, remember it is God offering to share with you His own life, and, as Kingsley says in 'The Saint's Tragedy,' the life of the universe:

> 'Could we but crush that ever-growing lust
> For bliss, which kills all bliss; and lose our life,
> Our barren unit life, to find again
> A thousand lives in those for whom we die:
> So were we men and women, and should hold
> Our rightful place in God's great universe,
> Wherein, in heaven and earth, by will or nature,
> Nought lives for self. All, all, from crown to foot-stool—
> The Lamb, before the world's foundation slain;
> The angels, ministers to God's elect;
> The sun, who only shines to light a world;
> The clouds, whose glory is to die in showers;
> The fleeting streams, who in their ocean graves
> Flee the decay of stagnant self-content;
> The oak, ennobled by the shipwright's axe;
> The soil, which yields its marrow to the flower;
> The flower which breeds a thousand velvet worms,

Born only to be prey to every bird—
All spend themselves on others; and shall man,
Whose twofold being is the mystic knot
Which couples earth and heaven—doubly bound,
As being both worm and angel, to that service
By which both worm and angel hold their lives—
Shall he, whose very breath is debt on debt,
Refuse, forsooth, to see what God has made him?
No, let him shew himself the creatures' lord
By freewill gift of that self-sacrifice
Which they, perforce, by nature's law must suffer;
Take up his cross, and follow Christ the Lord.'

'Shew us the Father'

'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'—JOHN xiv. 8-9.

'SHEW us the Father': there can be no doubt that this is the deepest longing of the heart of man—to be absolutely sure that somewhere and somehow there beats an infinite heart of love, guiding all, controlling all, causing all things to work together for good—a Being worthy to be called 'the Father.'

At first sight no such Being seems to exist. True, there are traces of a universal benevolence in the rounds of the seasons and the provision which Nature makes for our wants. Yet underneath this there exists a vast and terrible world. 'Nature,' says Carlyle, 'for all her greenness, rests on dread foundations.' Our earth is filled with sin and suffering—suffering which often seems to strike the innocent—with fear and disease and death.

It is no wonder that the human heart faints at times, that its faith seems to suffer betrayal and its hope to be confounded. 'Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.' But the heavens hang like a curtain; and if there sits One behind the veil, we feel that He is silent and makes no sign.

Yet Jesus declares that God is not silent. He Himself is the sign. It is a most marvellous claim for any man to dare to make—and remember that

Christ knew He would die for making it : 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. I am the revelation of the fatherly heart of the Eternal God. If you can understand my words and my doings, then you will understand what God is. You will see that He does not stand far away from His world in silence and indifference, that He is doing whatever a Father ought and whatever a Father can.'

At the outset let us consider the difficulty which meets us at the very threshold : if God is the Father, why did He not guard His children against sin and suffering? Could He not have secured His universe against the possibility of evil?

The answer, in all reverence, seems to be : No, He could not. The very idea of man is that of a being who can choose between right and wrong ; and if such a being is to exist, there must be the possibility of his making the wrong choice. Even if God could have compelled him to be good, forced goodness is not goodness. The possibility of an evil choice was inherent in the very nature of man ; and with that evil choice the whole world suffered the terrible shock which we see and feel. It would seem as if the only way to avoid this risk would have been not to create man at all.

The teaching of Scripture is that God ran the risk, and ran it in love ; that He Himself is the greatest sufferer ; that He takes the responsibility of creation on His own heart ; that in all our affliction He is afflicted ; that He is constantly mingling with His sad and sinful world for its redemption ; that this eternal purpose of salvation

He will never abandon until all things are gathered together in Christ. And of all this Christ declares Himself the proof—'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

Let us see, if possible, how the Fatherhood of God shines through our Lord's life.

It is one of the first duties of a father to give his children a certain training and discipline, especially in right character. Do we see in Christ's life anything corresponding to this? Who can doubt it? He took twelve men, and passed them through a great moral and spiritual training which made a perfect revolution in their life and character. They were not easy to train. Their minds were filled with lower and often false thoughts of both God and man; and their hearts held many a wrong ambition. Yet He never lost patience with them. Even the traitor was cared for to the last, and in the Garden one final appeal was made to his better nature: 'Comrade, wherefore art thou come?'

And this is the image of God. The world and life are assuredly constructed so as to form a great training for the human race. The conscience within, the necessity for daily work, intercourse with our fellow-men, the penalties that fall on wrong-doing, the conviction borne in on us that there is something in the universe that makes for righteousness:

> 'The half of a broken hope for a pillow at night,
> That somehow the right is the right,'

to quote the brave words of Stevenson: all these

form a great and strenuous discipline by which the Father of men trains His children throughout all generations, even as Christ trained His disciples.

But the true father gives more than training, or rather he gives that highest form of training which we call friendship. He is much more than a mere disciplinarian, a taskmaster and system of laws. Laws, indeed, there must be, but they are clothed in love. The fatherly authority is made easy and obedience glad by companionship.

Thus was it with Jesus and His disciples. He called them to follow Him, made Himself their friend and comrade in a daily familiar intercourse which made His yoke easy and His burden light. And even when He had to leave them as a bodily presence, it was to come closer in the spirit: 'I will not leave you comfortless' (that is to say, orphans); 'I will come to you.' His followers came to feel His constant nearness—it was as if their spirit and His penetrated each other and became one.

And this is how the Eternal Father is ever acting towards His children. We too often think of Him as a mere dead system of laws and forces, or at best a taskmaster or magistrate enforcing obedience from the outside by pains and penalties. It is not so. He is the Father, Whose spirit is ever seeking to mingle with our spirit in friendship and love—ever seeking by this spiritual communion to give, not merely laws, but the power to obey them. What we see Jesus doing when He entered into spiritual friendship with His disciples, that the Father is ever striving to do with the whole family

of mankind. It is an essential part of His Fatherhood.

And now, do we dare to go further, to say that Christ's meaning is: 'He that sees Me hanging on the Cross sees the Father'? I believe firmly that He does mean this. We narrow and belittle the Cross of Christ. We think it represents suffering for a few hours, and suffering in which God has no share. Both thoughts are wrong. The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world—slain in the sorrow of a father for his children's sin and suffering. It is psychologically impossible for a father who is himself good not to suffer when his son breaks away into rebellion and sin. His very love nails him to a cross of agony—he cannot help himself—he longs to save the unhappy and sinful soul—and he takes on himself whatever he can take of his shame and wretchedness.

Shall it be so with a human father, and not much more so with the Divine Father? If a sinful human father like David can say, 'Would God that I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' what shall we say of the Father Eternal? We may not know what the Atonement is, but it has no meaning, no reality, apart from this suffering in the heart of the Eternal Father for our sins, suffering which He endured before Christ hung on the Cross on Calvary, which He endures now, which He will continue to endure while sin and evil last.

Can we think that God sat cold and aloof, merely sending His Son to suffer for His creatures? Had He not rather the greater part in the sufferings of

Christ, both for the sake of Christ and for that of His sinful human children? If this is not so, then he who sees Christ does not see the Father. You may indeed love Christ because He died for you; but your love will not pass on through Him to God. You may indeed say that God cannot suffer—that He is lifted by His very nature above all human sorrow. If so, He is not more than man, but less. He who made the heart, shall He not feel? The Cross of Christ, if it means anything at all, is the revelation of the sorrow of God over human sin—the suffering of the Father's heart by which He bears the iniquity of His children that He may redeem them from its power.

Look at one other thing in the life of Jesus, His attitude to disease and death. We are in the habit of attributing these to the will of God; and doubtless He permits them. But to permit is not the same as to will. You cannot imagine any one worthy to be called 'the Father' deliberately creating children that they might waste away with sickness and vanish in the darkness of death, like a candle blown out at night.

Not a father, but an enemy, hath done this. All through Scripture disease and death are represented as of the kingdom of Satan. All through Christ's life He fought against them. When He fed the hungry multitudes and healed the sick and cast out evil spirits and raised the dead—when He Himself rose from the grave and called Himself the Resurrection and the Life: all this is but the revelation of the heart and will of the Father concerning

disease and pain and death. Even thus the Father is ever fighting against that realm of darkness and decay.

We may ask why an Infinite and Almighty God does not abolish disease and destroy death. The reason, according to Scripture, seems to be that disease and death, having come by moral means, can be expelled only by the same means. Sin has sent its shock of dissolution even through the material frame of things; and it is only as sin is conquered that the power of decay and dissolution also is conquered. Power alone is not enough—a moral element must enter in.

This is what St. Paul means in his great words about the final redemption of the natural world: 'The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.' When we see Christ healing the sick, raising the dead, bursting from the tomb and rising into an eternal and glorious life, we see what the Father is always doing—ever destroying death, ever striving to share His own eternal life with His children.

This, then, is the kind of God revealed in the living and dying of Christ Jesus. In certain moods we think God is indifferent to the tides of sin, suffering, and death that sweep the shores of the world. It is not so—Christ appeals confidently to Himself as proof. The Father is ever training and educating His children, as Jesus did His disciples; ever mingling His Spirit with theirs in a communion of love, as Jesus did with His friends in daily companionship; ever suffering with and for them, as

Jesus suffered on the Cross ; ever striving to deliver them from disease, as Jesus did when He healed the sick—giving out His own strength or 'virtue' if necessary, as when the woman touched Him in the crowd, so that in very truth He 'bore our infirmities' ; ever fighting against death, as when He raised the dead, and Himself rose from the tomb.

Are not these the very things we look for in a Father? And it is from Christ alone that we have learnt to think of God as such a Father. It is literally true that no man cometh to the Father save by Christ. Such a conception of God does not rise spontaneously in the human soul, though many of us imagine it does—as witness the forms of fear worshipped in heathen lands. To ancient Rome, God was power ; to ancient Greece, selfish pleasure ; to ancient Israel, the lawgiver. It was Jesus Christ Who taught that God is the Eternal Father fulfilling a Father's duties—educating, inspiring, suffering, giving an eternal life to His children, showing us what Fatherhood should be. Where else will you get such a conception of God? Not from Nature ; not from the men around you ; only from Christ Who says, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

'Come unto Me'

'Come unto me.'—MATT. xi. 28.

THE subject of which I wish to speak is the personalness, one might almost say the personality, of the Christian religion. If you examine the four Gospels honestly, you cannot but see that the one thing Christ preached was Himself. He presented no abstract system of Truth; He said, 'I am the Truth.' He preached no philosophical doctrine of God; He said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' He gave no bare dogmatic statement of the Resurrection; He said, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' He taught no theory of the human conscience; He said, 'I am the Light of the World.' He gave no doctrine of the Holy Spirit; He said, 'He shall bear witness of me.'

In short, he preached no ready-made system of religious truth. He simply said: 'Come unto me': 'learn of me': 'follow me': 'love me': 'obey me': 'I am the Good Shepherd': 'I am the true Vine': 'I am the Bread that came down from heaven': 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' One thing is sure—that Christ conceived Truth, Morality, Religion as all contained in His own personality, and in our personal relation to Himself.

Let us try, then, to disentangle this simple fact

from all those views of Christianity with which we have confused it.

To begin with, Christianity is not a history : it is Christ. I do not say that history is not involved in it—if it is anything, it is a historical religion. But mere study of it as a history does not make a man a Christian, any more than does the study of any other history. Nor is it a system of intellectual speculation—creed, religious philosophy, or theology. All that is simply the reflection of our minds upon religion, but the religion itself is Christ and our relation to Him, person to person.

It is surely obvious that this greatly simplifies the whole of religion, and thereby widens its appeal. Consider how universal is our interest in the personality of our neighbours. The interest may simply be curiosity resulting in gossip or scandal, but even this shows how strong is our interest in persons. A novel which evolves the characters and fortunes of men and women is far more widely read than a treatise on philosophy.

Now, it is just this natural human instinct to which Christ appeals. If His religion were simply a philosophy, it could appeal only to the few whose minds are interested in such studies. But a drama is unfolded before our eyes ; He presents Himself—a personality to be loved, followed, obeyed ; and millions who know nothing of systems of thought—the poor toilers of the world, the little child, nay, the very savage—all have the universal human power to love a person and obey him.

This personalness of our religion brings Chris-

tianity down to its simplest possible form ; it makes it accessible to all by embodying it in a human life. As Tennyson says :

> 'Truth embodied in a tale
> Shall enter in at lowly doors.
>
> 'And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought ;
>
> 'Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
> Or builds the house or digs the grave,
> And those wild eyes that watch the wave
> In roarings round the coral reef.'

Once more, think how endlessly interesting a great personality is—how constantly those who care for him are discovering in him new things.

I think this is peculiarly true of Christ. When a preacher has reduced Him to a mere philosophic or doctrinal system of thought, his preaching inevitably grows monotonous—a repetition of his little round of 'truths' Sunday after Sunday. No such monotony is likely to settle down on him who preaches Christ as a Person. For the Person is living : he can show Him in a hundred different circumstances—in toil and rest, in silence and speech, in relations with God and man, in joy and suffering, in life, death, and resurrection. The personality of Jesus is inexhaustible—fresh aspects of it are continually seen, and therefore monotony and dulness are impossible to any one interested in it.

This is one great difference between a thought and a person. A thought is like a piece of furniture —you add it to the other furniture of a room, and in a few days you are accustomed to it and scarcely notice it. But a person is alive, moves, acts, speaks, suffers, and reveals the mysterious development of character. We preachers too often present a lifeless system of impersonal thought, instead of the living Person, ever new, fresh, interesting in the revelation of life and character.

And then, just as a personality is interesting, so also is it powerful. Apart from religion altogether, the greatest power for good or for evil, in the life of every one of us, is the influence of persons. It is persons, often, through whom we believe or disbelieve ; persons who lead us in the way of life or the way of death ; persons through whom come our greatest joys or sorest sorrows. This is how God has made us—to have our personality played on continually by other personalities ; and this personal power at its Divinest is brought to bear upon us in Christ.

There is absolutely no power to be compared to that of Christ as a person in the purifying of human hearts and lives. Other forces cannot kill the tyranny of sin. There is the force of law and penalty : but men will defy law and dare the penalty. There are the inner restraints of conscience, but they are swept away like straws upon the wind before the hurricane of human passion. There are the obligations of our creed—logically we ought not to sin, holding the high moral and religious creed we do. But the power of evil warring against

the law in our mind makes short work of logic and consistency.

But now, let the man with whom such restraints are powerless but yield his heart to this Person, Jesus Christ, and immediately he feels that a power unlike all the rest has touched the very springs of his life and character. Impersonal and abstract powers have tried and failed; but there is something in personality which touches personality as nothing else can. Again and again we see men and women, whom no other power has been able to rescue or restrain from sin, suddenly arrested, turned, changed; and the only solution of the spiritual miracle they can give is simply that they obeyed Christ's invitation, 'Come unto me,' and that He made new creatures of them. There is no power in the world like that personal power of Jesus Christ to gather the personal affections of men round Himself, and thereby cut the very nerves of sin and paralyse its strength.

And this is as true of the reform of communities and churches. We trace, doubtless with some truth, such reformations to many causes—the growth of thought, political changes, the culmination of evils and abuses. Nevertheless, I am convinced that if we could see the real root of such reformations we would invariably find it in this personality of Jesus Christ. A few men throughout the centuries, quickened by a hatred of oppression or wrong, had their hearts touched by Christ Himself, and found in the mysterious depths of the human-Divine personality the living forces which changed

society, cast down strongholds of Satan, and rolled the world in a new course.

There are, then, three great values and powers involved in the fact that our religion is just Christ Himself—a living Person and not some impersonal system or abstraction : it throws religion open to all ; it makes it a thing of perpetual interest, for Christ's personality is inexhaustible ; it brings to bear on human nature the strongest of all purifying powers—that of person on person.

And now, let us consider why this personal power is thus the greatest. I think at root it comes to this, that nothing but a personality can lift up the whole of our personality into itself. Other powers may take up fragments of our personality—nothing else takes up the whole. For personality consists of three things—a mind that thinks, a heart that feels, a will that makes moral decisions. Now, the Personality of Christ has the same three elements, and in such perfection that they can, as it were, absorb our mind, heart, will, into themselves.

We do not usually think of Christ as intellectual ; nevertheless His words are full of intellect : and it is only when His mind dominates ours that we begin truly to develop our mental power. However great an intellect may be without Christ, it is still greater with Him, as Wesley found after his conversion. The mind is taken up into the mind of Christ and so inspired by it that our very thoughts are His. Again, there never beat a heart on earth with the same intensity and fire of pure, unselfish love ; and thus when a human heart is drawn to Christ it finds

there the perfect love for which it longs, and the fire of that love burns through it more and more, until it is fused into oneness with Christ's own heart, loving what He loves, hating what He hates. And there never was another human will that always made the right choice. That is why He can reinforce the weakness of our wills by the unconquered strength of His own. He can take up into that will of His our weak wills, and pour into them such strength of purpose that they gradually grow like His own.

Nothing but personality, and perfect personality, can thus lift up all the elements of our personality into itself. Impersonal systems of law, or thought, or dogma will never do it. It needs a mind to inspire a mind : a heart to set a heart on fire : a will to strengthen a will : a person to save a person.

I feel almost as if by these last words I were obscuring the simplicity I wish to make plain. So it is best to get back to the words, 'Come unto me.' You cannot imagine simpler words. Christianity is just Christ Himself—the simple love and obedience of a Person infinitely worthy of both.

Let nothing beguile you from this simplicity that is in Christ. To be religious you and I do not need to think out every problem and unravel all mysteries. It is far simpler than that—the meeting of person with person : mind with mind, heart with heart, will with will. Or, to return to His own dear and simple words : 'Come unto me' : 'follow me' : 'learn of me' : 'love me' : 'obey me.' In this age of ours, when a thousand speculations fill the air, it is surely a great thing to be able to see that,

whatever else is uncertain, Christ Himself is sure—'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' Is it not the plain truth that no matter what else any of you may doubt, there is one thing you simply cannot doubt—the character of Christ Jesus: His absolute truthfulness, His perfect righteousness, His entire unselfishness, the completeness of His sacrifice of Himself in love to our sinful race?

There is no doubt whatever about all this—none; and just as little doubt that all this is what we ought to be. That form fairer than the sons of men, moving about the hills and fields of Galilee, mixing among sinful men and women, laying hands of healing on the sick, forgiving the outcast, taking the children into His arms and blessing them—that is what every son of man ought to be. To come to Him is, in its final and essential meaning, to take that ideal of character as our ideal, to rely on Him for all the help we need in our striving to reach it. It is all as simple as the trust of a little child in its mother. Not one of us needs to wait, before giving that trust, until all questions are answered and all doubts solved. In the words of the late Principal Shairp of St. Andrews:

'I have a life in Christ to live,
But ere I live it, must I wait
Till learning can clear answer give
Of this or that book's date?

'I have a life in Christ to live,
I have a death in Christ to die:—
And must I wait till Science give
All doubts a full reply?

'Nay rather, while the sea of doubt
Is raging wildly round about,
Questioning of life and death and sin,
Let me but creep within

'Thy fold, O Christ, and at Thy feet
Take but the lowest seat,
And hear Thine awful voice repeat,
In gentlest accents, heavenly sweet,
"Come unto Me and rest,
Believe Me and be blest."'

'Declared' (constituted) 'to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.'—ROMANS i. 4.

ALMOST invariably we regard the Resurrection of Christ as a miracle, and we take for granted that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, or at least something outside of those laws. Against this we must learn that absolutely nothing lies outside the laws of nature, and that a violation of them is impossible. We must widen the meaning of nature. Nature is not confined to the little circle with which we are familiar. To a savage the telegraph, the telephone, the wireless are miracles, yet we know they are possible only by means of natural laws. Similarly, human nature is not just the small circle of things about ourselves with which we are familiar. We are discovering that even within this nature of ours there seem to exist mysterious depths, powers which we are just beginning to recognise, and which seem to be miraculous only because of our past ignorance. Hence we must not mistake things which lie beyond our knowledge and science as being beyond nature—they are simply parts of nature which we do not yet understand. Indeed, sometimes scientists take up what is virtually the

position of the savage. They often draw a line round nature, and what lies beyond their knowledge of it is denied as unnatural, superstitious.

Now, apply this to the Resurrection. We assume that because we have never seen one rise from the dead the thing is impossible, and that to believe in the Resurrection of Christ is to believe in a violation of nature. But may it not be, as I certainly believe, that the nature of Christ is just the true human nature, and that to the true human nature death is unnatural, immortality alone natural? Let us ask ourselves why a perfectly sinless man, as we believe Him to be, should die at all. He has, by supposition, never departed by the commission of sin from the true course of humanity—why then should He be put out of existence? To slay an innocent man is the real violation of nature, revolting all our instincts of the natural rights of man. Our hearts and consciences instinctively associate holiness and life, as they instinctively associate sin and death. An innocent child never realises death; the realisation comes with the bitterer and more sinful knowledge of later years.

Now, this is the deepest idea underlying Scripture. To many in these days, I admit, Scripture is no proof. Nevertheless, let us see what its view is. At the root of everything is this—that man's true nature is holiness, and that therefore what we call the natural, meaning the sinful, man is really the unnatural man. The natural man is the good man. The unnatural man is the man who, by sin, has departed from his true nature. Now, this may be

right or wrong, but most certainly it is the view of Scripture. Even if we take the opinion of many in our day, that evil is but 'good in the making,' still we come to the same moral conclusion—evil is not man's true nature, and goodness is.

Let us take a step further. Scripture takes a vast and serious view of sin and its destructive power. And, no matter what our theory of sin may be, we are forced to see that something terrible has gone wrong with the world: hatreds, murders, wars, robberies, tyrannies, cruelties, 'man's inhumanity to man'—we cannot deny that these exist. We ourselves are involved in them; they touch our lives; they even issue from our own hearts. But the view of Scripture goes still deeper. It teaches that sin is so dread a thing that it involves the very material fabric of the world; in the words of St. James about a mere fragment of sin, 'it setteth on fire the wheel of nature.' In other words, sin penetrates, first into the physical nature of man, directly or indirectly producing disease and death. The inhumanity of man to man, carelessness about infection, the overcrowding of the poor into slums, the overwork imposed by worldly employers—all around us are the evidences of sin as the originator of disease, often, alas! in the innocent. But Scripture goes deeper than this. Sin is so destructive a power that it turns nature into un-nature; infuses vanity, corruption, into the whole universe, so that the very earth and the animals are dragged down into sorrow by the sin of man, as head of the system of the world. Nature is what God meant the universe to be. This

is un-nature, and the very meaning of salvation is to bring it back to its true nature by the elimination of moral evil. This idea runs through Scripture from first to last. 'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.' 'The wages of sin is death.' Pain and disease are no part of the will of God for man as man —they are part of the will of His adversary. The woman of whom we read in St. Luke's Gospel who was bowed to the ground with a spirit of infirmity was bound by Satan. St. Paul calls his thorn in the flesh a messenger of Satan to buffet him. The very mission of Christ was that 'through death he might destroy the power of death, that is, the devil.' The final redemption of the universe from sin and its consequences is represented as the end of the whole terrible process. 'The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.' And in Scripture the great tragedy of the ruined world ends in its redemption into the state for which God originally made it—a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, a holy city, a new Jerusalem wherein there will be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain, because God is all and in all.

I do not know where we can find any more magnificent conception of the connection between sin and death, and between holiness and life; any that creates a greater hope; or any that is more likely and worthy to be true. And now, on the basis of

this conception, suppose that a Man appeared in this ruined world of death, Who stood entirely outside that state of sin which brought death as its proper wages—can we not see that death is not His proper wage? He enters this sin-ruined and disordered world. He faces all its unnaturalness of moral evil, hatred of goodness, pain and agony of death—yet without sin. If for great reasons of Divine love it pleased Him to stoop into the 'dark, tremendous cloud' of death, it is not for necessity of this unnatural world of sin, but for necessity of grace and holiness. And why should it be regarded as a miracle that such an One should rise out of death and the grave? It is in the direct line of the nature of Holiness, which God meant to be our nature. And this is exactly what St. Paul declares when he says, 'according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.' When St. Paul says 'according to,' he means 'according to the law' of the thing of which he speaks. Hence he means here that Christ rose from the dead, not against nature, but according to the law of holiness, through some power of life inherent in, and natural to, perfect goodness. We have never seen perfect holiness. We have never seen anything but sin working according to the law of its own unnatural nature. We cannot say that resurrection is not perfectly natural to a perfectly good man, because we have never known such a man, save in Him Who is the Son of Man. It is the inherent nature of holiness to create life, and life more abundant; hence the Resurrection was according to the natural law of perfect goodness.

And it is this Spirit of Holiness which creates the same power of resurrection in believers in Christ: but remember that to believe in Christ means to follow His example—not merely to give an intellectual assent to a creed. At the Last Judgment those who have pity towards the hungered and the afflicted are those who will be saved, even though they say, 'Lord, when saw we thee an-hungered?' The final test is the universal one of love—not of assent to a creed which millions throughout the ages have never had the chance of knowing.

The resurrection of the good is no more a miracle in the ordinary sense of the word than was Christ's. It is not that God, by a mere external act of power at the Last Day, raises the dead body. It is that true faith in Christ receives the spirit of holiness which raised Jesus, and by the natural law of that holiness raises also the believer's body. The process is as inevitable as any of the phenomena of the natural world. It is the natural working of the Spirit of God in the spirit of man. As St. Paul says, 'The Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, through his Spirit that dwelleth in you.' And remember that the spiritual body is being created here and now. We ourselves are creating it, by every thought and deed that are in accordance with the Spirit of Holiness.

'Thou seemest Human and Divine'

('There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.'—ISAIAH xi. 1.)

'I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.'—REVELATION xxii. 16.

ONE great defect of our Christianity is the poor and shallow way in which we conceive of Christ. If our thought of Him were anything like that of Scripture, everything connected with Him would become marvellously transfigured with His light—His Word, His Church, His Table, even ourselves as one with Him. It is in the hope of catching something of this truer conception of Him that I choose this text. Yet it is far from being an easy one, for all the simplicity of the words. It contains a series of contrasts, or apparent contrasts, which I wish to draw out briefly—not by dry logical processes, but rather by the pictorial images which seem to have risen before the Apostle's mind.

The first is surely between the earthly and the heavenly existence of Jesus. Before St. John's eye arose the figure of the family of David under the form of a tree. Jesus belonged to that family. He was the root and the offspring of it. The Apostle never could forget His Humanity — the 'sweet human hand and lips and eye'—the breast on which

he leaned and felt the beating of the heart within. And that Humanity, he feels, is eternal. No change of death, resurrection, ascension, can destroy it. Jesus has passed into worlds beyond his power to conceive, but He is still the root and the offspring of David, still a member of that Jewish family to which St. John himself is said to have belonged. The risen Christ did not abandon His human nature when He 'ascended into heaven.'

And that surely is one of our deepest wants—the assurance that Christ is eternally human, that having assumed our nature he does not strip it off, fold it up, and lay it aside like an outworn garment. When at the last we stand before His judgment seat, it will be the Son of Man who looks us through and through—who understands us, not merely because He was human once, but because He is human now and for ever. His last message is to give us assurance of this unchangeable Humanity: 'I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David'—bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh.

Having a human Saviour, is that all we then need? St. John does not think so. That family tree of David rooted in the little spot of earth named Palestine fades from his eyes; and instead there rises 'the bright and morning star,' as doubtless from the isle of Patmos he had seen it many a time after a night of storm and darkness, floating in the infinite spaces of the morning light. You cannot help feeling the greatness of the contrast—the

tree rooted in the little plot of earth below, the shining morning star in the vastness of the heaven above.

Can we be mistaken in taking the star as the figure of His Divine being—the heavenly world and glory from which He came, to which He returned? Believe me, if we need a human Saviour, not less do we need one who is Divine. It is hard to understand how any one can dream that one who was simply man could rescue a world like this out of the pit of sin and wretchedness into which it has fallen. Say that Jesus was nothing more than the offspring of David, then He was the offspring of a man stained with many sins, and some taint of them would have defiled Him. So far from saving others, He would need a purer one to save Himself. Be quite sure it will take a God to save a world like this—One Who, while He is in very truth the offspring of David, none the less shines like the bright and morning star a whole heaven above it, unpolluted with its sin.

This, then, is what St. John saw: Jesus human and Divine—the root and offspring of David and the bright and morning star. Without both, he could not conceive of the possibility of salvation.

But we may see another contrast without unduly straining the words—that between a local Saviour and a universal one. The very word David brings to our mind the Jewish nation, with its fixed belief that the Messiah was to be sent to it alone. That might be possible with a Messiah who was only the offspring of David; not with one who is also the bright

and morning star. You cannot build walls so as to keep the morning star the property of one nation ; it shines over the wide world and gladdens weary eyes in every land.

And this is precisely the spiritual miracle of Jesus of Nazareth. He is at once the Jewish Messiah rooted in Palestine and the universal light. 'Amid all the various speculations and opinions about Christ's person,' as one says, 'all believers in Him agree in this : that He most perfectly represented the type of human life ; not a humanity exceptional in its qualities, but the true human, drawn in exceptional lines of light and fire, but recognisable still by every man who deeply studied his own nature. Here is the first unshaken power of that wonderful life. The Jew and the Saxon have found the Man of Nazareth their brother. The man of the first century and the man of the nineteenth have found in Him the interpretation of themselves. The hero on the battlefield, the martyr at the stake, the schoolboy at his desk, the mother in her anxieties, all pour out to Him their fears, and draw from Him their courage.'

But it cannot be for nothing that it is the morning star and not any other. The morning star is the morning star just because the night precedes and the day follows it. And how true this is of Christ ! Take this book of Revelation. An awful night of blackness and tempest rolls through the first twenty chapters. 'The shadows grow darker and the lights fainter as the vision draws to its close, while the forms that rise up out of the abyss grow more

bestial and horrible. So the beast succeeds the dragon, and the mouth of the beast speaks still fiercer blasphemies, and Babylon the great grows still mightier, and she whose name is Mystery drinks deep, even to drunkenness, of the blood of the saints, and the witnesses lie slain and unburied in the streets of the great city, and the woman flies into the wilderness; until at last Heaven is opened, and He who is faithful and true comes forth to judge and to make war in righteousness.' Then suddenly the sound and fury of battle are swept into the distance and darkness of the night—'the day breaks and the shadows flee away'—the bright and morning star shines forth with promise of the new and better day—the new heavens and the new earth—the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And this is what St. John meant by the bright and morning star. Christ ends the darkness of the night and ushers in a new day. Many and many a time in the long history of the world has He done this. On His Church there has settled down again and again the night of persecution, worldliness, unbelief, or dead routine, in which His Cause and Kingdom seemed lost. But nothing was lost. Again and again the shadows broke and the dawn rose; and there in the infinite, eternal sky was Christ, the bright and morning star, the herald of a new day, a Diviner development of His Truth and Kingdom.

There are few things we need to learn more than the meaning of this symbol of the morning star. If

we are to believe the lamentations of our time, we are in the thick night of religious indifference. Be it so. It will pass as a hundred such nights have passed ; and when it passes it will be Christ and not another who is shining in the heavens above our heads.

But the morning star suggests a thought difficult to state without risk of misunderstanding. This star which is the herald of the day disappears in the full sunlight of that day. Does Christ do this? Will there ever dawn some final day of salvation when the bright and morning star will hide Himself in the eternal light?

Do not imagine that it is irreverence to say that day will come. This does not mean that Christ will pass away, any more than the morning star is blotted out of existence by the sunlight. It means that when Christ's great work of salvation is accomplished, and He has brought His people finally and directly to God, so that God is 'all in all,' the Kingdom is delivered to the Father, and the Son takes the position of a son. In the great words of St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 24-28) :

'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

'For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

'For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.'

These words are far too great for us to understand. At present we know God, not immediately, but through Christ as Mediator. But a day is coming when Christ will have brought His people so perfectly to God that God is 'all in all'—all things in all believers—absolutely nothing in them that is not God. It is impossible for us to imagine what this direct and immediate knowledge of God must be—this final and perfect union, when even Christ is no longer necessary as an interpreter of the Father. We must not imagine this takes away any of the honour due to Christ. Just this is His honour: to bring His people into such union and communion with the Father that He can leave them there, spirit to spirit, God all in all.

And now, my friends, this is He at Whose Table we sit and to Whose Church we belong—One Who says, 'I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star'; One Who is at once human and Divine—rooted in the soil of Palestine, and shining in the heavens; One Who is no mere local and national Saviour, but 'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel'; One Who rises clear and undimmed after every dark night of sin and unbelief, and ushers in a new day; One Who reigns till He hath put all enemies under His feet, Who delivers the kingdom to God, and is

Himself content, like the bright and morning star, to lose Himself in the light of that great eternal day. Think what it is to be a follower of such an One, to take the Communion bread and wine, symbol of His body broken and His blood shed for the salvation of all men, to be caught up into the great movement of humanity and Divinity, of earth and stars, of Father, Son, and Spirit, of time and eternity, of this world and of that which is to come!

Let us do Christ the justice of receiving Him as both human and Divine. It does Him little honour to forget, as was too often the tendency of the past, the lovableness of His human nature in a cold and austere conception of His Divinity. Neither let us drift along the stream of modern tendencies, and, in our admiration for Jesus the man, forget that, in order to raise our nature to 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God,' a God had to 'mingle in the game.' The two natures are not really separate. In his lines about his dead friend, Tennyson speaks of how the two worlds mingle in his thought of him, sanctifying both :—

'Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near in woe and weal;
O loved the most, when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher;

'Known and unknown; human, divine;
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine.

'Strange friend, past, present, and to be;
Loved deeplier, darklier understood;
Behold, I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee.'

Surely, in some such way as this should we think of Him who is at once 'the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.'

Was Christ the Product of His Time?
I. A Survey of Judaism

'As a root out of a dry ground.'—ISAIAH liii. 2.

ONE of the most important questions for Christians is whether or not Christ was simply the product of His time. Can we account for His spirit and character by the world into which He was born? Can we trace His teaching to any of the religions then existing in Judaism, Greece, Rome, or the East? In short, can we account for Christendom and all that it may yet mean by saying it is simply the result of forces existing in the world of Christ's day—and that these have moulded Him, and through Him all generations? Even could we do so, we must yet explain how this one man gathered in His teaching all that was good, rejecting all that was evil. Whence came this discernment that changed the history of the world?

Many writers say that Jesus was a Jew with national limitations, and that He drew His teaching from various sources in the thought of His own and the surrounding nations. In examining the truth of this, I propose to take not an isolated saying here and there in the various religions then existing, but the central spirit of each, and then compare that

with the teaching of Jesus Christ. Most certainly is there good in those religions, points of contact which Christ would have been the first to welcome; but what is of real importance is the central spirit and aim.

To begin with, Jesus was a Jew, born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, of the house of David. He scarcely for a moment passed beyond the borders of His native land, a small Roman province about one-sixth the size of England, one-third that of Scotland. In this small country lived a race the spirit of which was that of disdain and dislike for the rest of mankind. Let us never forget the debt we owe to that wonderful nation which gave us morality and religion, and of which the Christ Himself was born. We do Him little honour when we do not honour His country, when we forget that He was all the more a patriot because He offered it a spiritual kingdom which would have given it so strong an ethical position among the nations that the tyranny of Rome would have mattered nothing—though perhaps national independence also would have been added unto it. 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets . . .; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!' It was natural that the Jews, having alone received a pure worship, should think themselves the chosen of Heaven; it would perhaps be beyond mere human nature not to regard other nations with contempt. And their spirit was indeed one of extreme exclusiveness.

Heathen authors speak of them thus. Their own Josephus says they despised the learning of foreign languages as fit only for slaves—the only language worth knowing was that in which their Law was written. When their Holy Books were translated into Greek, it was regarded in Jerusalem 'as a bitter day, like the day when the golden calf was made.' The later Rabbis laid on those who gave their sons Greek learning the same curse as on possessors of swine. The evidence might be multiplied almost endlessly ; but one example from the life of Jesus shows the lengths to which this hostility towards the Gentiles carried His fellow-countrymen. When in the synagogue at Nazareth He ventured to say that prophets of Israel were sent to a heathen man and a heathen widow, His neighbours, shocked at His impiety, attempted to fling Him headlong from the brow of the hill.

Had Jesus been merely the child of His time and country He must have shared this central spirit of His race. If so, how comes it that His teaching has passed from land to land with its universal appeal of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, inspiring its followers with the ambition of winning the world for Christ—for One Who despised all save His own countrymen ? When the Greeks wished to see Him, He saw in their desire the call to that lifting up on the Cross which should draw all men unto Him. Because Jesus is not the child of His time, He is the child of all times. He was not simply the Son of the Jew, because He is also the Son of Man, the ideal and universal humanity.

In His life, teaching, and spirit we find what constitutes true humanity in its full length and breadth.

But let us pursue this into further detail. In the Palestine of Christ's day, Judaism was broken up into three sects, or sections. With the Pharisees and Sadducees the New Testament has made us familiar; the Essenes it never directly names. And once more let us take the central spirit of each, and ask whether one or all of them could have produced the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth.

One would think that Christ's attitude to the Pharisees, and theirs to Him, would at once disprove the idea that He drew His teaching from any of their Rabbis. The Gospels are full of denunciations of their righteousness. By their oral traditions they made void the commandments of God, making the Sabbath a burden, rendering it possible for a son in the name of duty to God to throw off his parents to starvation, discussing trivialities such as whether it is the temple or the gold of the temple which makes an oath binding. This, be it remembered, was false, not true Judaism. The very capacity for faithful obedience which made God choose Israel tended to produce an over-anxiety in keeping minute points of the law, which the unscrupulous twisted to unethical ends. Christ did not accept the religion of the Pharisees as true Judaism. To Him, Who came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it, such teaching 'made void' the commandments of God given through Moses. Nevertheless, while they spun the weighty matters of the law—justice, mercy, faith—into an endless web of casuistries,

He went straight to the central spirit of all law, the spirit of love. He denounced the externality of their righteousness. We all know the hatred this provoked against Him. Yet so ingenious is the human mind that some have declared that a Rabbi of the Pharisees was the true teacher of Jesus. Renan says that Jesus derived His doctrine from the famous Rabbi, Hillel, grandfather of that Gamaliel at whose feet St. Paul sat. Now, Hillel was the flower of Rabbis, the most kindly, genial, spiritual of them all. Let it be granted that he summed up the Law in the words, 'What is unpleasing to thee do not to thy neighbour. This is the whole Law; all the rest is commentary.' Yes, but the commentary is important. Has it any resemblance to the commentary which Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount? For instance, one of Hillel's most famous decisions was concerning a dispute as to whether it was lawful to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath. He taught that, according to the Law, a man might divorce his wife for cooking his dinner badly. Compare this with Christ's saying that a wife may be divorced only for infidelity. In short, Hillel's whole commentary is foreign to the teaching of Christ. If He uttered nothing original, as some moderns say, how is it that, as Dean Farrar points out, 'whereas the very name of Hillel is unknown except to scholars, the words of Jesus wrought the mightiest revolution that has ever been witnessed in the world'? The Law is the heart of all the Pharisaic system, and His whole treatment of it is different in method and in spirit.

Turn now to the priestly and aristocratic class in Israel—the Sadducees. They accepted the Law, but rejected the Pharisaic comments and traditions. In Moses they found nothing about a future life, so they denied the Pharisees' doctrine of a Kingdom of God beyond the grave, a world of spirits and angels, where men receive rewards after the resurrection. To the Sadducees the Kingdom of God was on earth, in Palestine; the reward, material prosperity, long life and abundant posterity, in which alone a man finds his resurrection. We can judge for ourselves whether Christ is indebted to them for His doctrine of the future world with its rewards and punishments, and His teaching about the resurrection. We know from St. John's Gospel that it was the resurrection of Lazarus which drew on Jesus the deadly vengeance of the Sadducean priests. So long as Jesus denounced their enemies the Pharisees, they did not silence Him; but this raising from the dead threatened their own place and power, and they determined on His death. But again, before utterly condemning the Jews for the death of Christ, let us ask ourselves how we would receive Him if He came here and now. In our treatment of the Jews themselves we have fallen as far short of the Law of Christ as the priests of His day fell short of the Law of Moses. Let us not forget that we crucify Him every day in each act of injustice done to the 'least of these.'

We come now to the Essenes. They were a brotherhood of Jewish monks with a reverence for the Law so great that to speak against it was

accounted worthy of death They did not go up to the sacrifices in the Temple, because their own meals were their sacrifices. They kept the Sabbath with more than Pharisaic strictness. They considered the body as impure and evil. Wine and meat were shunned ; bread and water were their food and drink ; marriage was forbidden among the majority of them ; money was not used ; property was held in common. They prayed to the sun each morning ; bathing was an essential part of their religion, cleanliness being itself godliness. They withdrew to the desert on the east of Jordan, and abandoned all hope of a Messianic kingdom on earth. Their kingdom of heaven was entrance into a state of pure spiritual being ; and so entire was their separation from mankind, that contact with an inferior brother of their own order brought a defilement which could only be washed away by bathing. Thus separation from the world, abandonment even of Israel, was the central idea of this strange sect. Morally it was by far the purest section of Palestine, but it refused to mix with even its own countrymen for their own good.

Now, some say that Christ was a member of this community, and that from its teaching He drew His doctrines of love to God and love to man. Let us, then, compare His way of showing love to man with that of the Essenes. His first public act was to leave the wilderness, go to a marriage feast, and make wine for the guests. Critics may say that this, as a miracle, is discredited ; but even were this legend, it must have grown up from the knowledge

of His views on life. He sanctioned the family life and blessed little children. We misunderstand Him when we think certain of His sayings make little of human relationships. When He says, 'Call no man father upon earth,' He is using the word father in the sense of rabbi. 'Do not follow blindly,' He virtually says, 'the voices of tradition. Trust your own conscience which your Father in heaven has given you.' When He says that we must 'hate father and mother' for His sake, He is saying in an extreme Oriental way that if we do wrong for the sake of even those nearest and dearest we are not worthy of Him. Again, Christ refused to allow the Sabbath to become a burden by its strictness. He discountenanced the merely ceremonial ablutions of the Pharisees. While He doubtless recognised the need for reasonable hygienic laws, He condemned over-carefulness in the matter of what it was lawful to eat and drink by declaring that a man is defiled only by the evil thoughts coming out of his own heart. He mixed freely with every class of society, even the outcasts, accepting invitations to dine with Pharisee and publican alike, until he was called 'a friend of publicans and sinners.' He raised the dead, while the Essenes held that purely spiritual being was the highest good; and once more, if this be a legend, it grew up from what was known of His ideas on death and resurrection. Above all, the Essenes retired to the desert, abandoning a world which they despaired to save. Jesus set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem to lay down His life for the salvation of all mankind. Will any reason-

able man or woman say that that free spirit, seeking men in their homes and in their daily callings, was derived from an order of ascetic monks who counted the very touch of their fellows pollution? Had that been the meaning and range of Christ's love to man, His religion had never travelled beyond the desert.

No, Jesus Christ is not the product of His age and land, any more than He would be the product of ours if He were born here and now. The contempt of the Jew for others was so natural, all things considered, that we can only account for its absence in Christ by seeking for the reason in some source higher than our foolish human nature. Certainly He caused His gospel to be preached to every creature. The Pharisee made the Law a thing of letter and rule; Jesus made it a thing of life and spirit. The Sadducee denied the immortality of the human soul and made the earth all; Jesus gave to the soul hopes which demanded eternity and were themselves the earnest of its immortality. The Essene counted the touch of the world pollution; Jesus walked straight into that world, mixed with its very outcasts, laid down His life to redeem it. He stands out from His surroundings as separate and original. Nor does this argument hang on some minute point or isolated saying. Each time I have taken the central spirit of each sect or party, and each time is that central spirit the antithesis of that of Christ. He was indeed a root out of the dry ground of the world into which He came. The soil of the Palestine He loved so well could not alone have nurtured so strange and beautiful a flower.

Was Christ the Product of His Time?
II. Rome, Greece, Buddhism

'As a root out of a dry ground.'—ISAIAH liii. 2.

LAST Sunday I examined Christ's relation to His own nation, and concluded that He was not the product of its religious teaching. Let us see, however, whether His religion and spirit can be traced to other lands and races—to Rome, the great imperial power which held Palestine in its grasp; to Greece, the culture of which, despite Jewish dislike, penetrated even Judaism; to the East and Buddhism, the true source, according to many, of what is distinctive in Christ. As before, I shall try to reach the central spirit of each religion or philosophy. To argue from some chance resemblance is useless.

No one, I think, has suggested that Jesus drew any part of His religion from ancient Rome; and yet, strangely enough, the thought of so doing seems to have occurred to Him. Nothing less than that is involved in the Temptation of all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Jesus aimed at the creation of a universal empire. At the time of His birth, Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, ruled over a realm which 'extended from the ocean on the west to the Euphrates, from the

Danube and the Rhine to the cataracts of the Nile and the deserts of Africa and Arabia.' As a subject of this vast empire He grew up, and the evidences of its power were daily before His eyes. If, then, there came to Him there in the wilderness the almost incredible resolve to create a still greater empire, obviously He would recognise how important would be the choice of the means by which to accomplish this. Perhaps the subtlety of diplomacy, perhaps the force of armies or of miracles, would sweep the Roman tyranny away and set up the Kingdom of God. Yes, but would it be a Kingdom of God, set up by such means? The most original thing in Jesus is that He saw clearly it would be a kingdom of Satan rather, founded on the worship of Satan —as must also be our British Empire unless it be held together by freedom and by justice towards the humblest of its subjects.

Now, it is important to mark carefully that religion in pagan Rome was merely the tool of the state, valuable only as a political instrument. Lightfoot says: 'The worship of the ancient Roman was essentially political, as that of the ancient Greek was artistic. His deities were political powers; his ceremonials political functions.' 'All the public offices in Rome were connected with the sanctuary of some god. The temple of Mars was the war office; the temple of Juno, the mint; the temple of Saturn, the treasury; and so forth. Thus every official duty was bound up with some religious sanction.' And, inasmuch as the chief offices of the state were concentrated in the person

of the Emperor, his deification followed almost as a matter of course. His effigy was set up throughout the Empire; and the refusal to burn incense to him as a god was punished with death as political treason. 'If thou wilt fall down and worship me,' said Satan. Nothing is more original than the clearness with which Christ saw that thus to entangle the Kingdom of God with the means and policies of the world involved this Satanic worship in some form—open and unashamed in the Roman Empire, secret and disguised from itself in many a church and state since. For whether the Church hold the temporal power, or the temporal power rule the Church, the confusion and entanglement are against the Kingdom of God. Jesus saw this in the Roman Empire, and He resolved to avoid entangling His Kingdom with political systems. 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight,' He said to the representative of the Roman domination, symbol of the power He had put aside. And saying it, He faced the Cross and mounted His throne of spirit and of truth.

We turn now to Greece—to intellect refined to the point of beauty. The Greek worshipped the human mind, and his wisdom penetrated even Judaism, so that some think it has, in some measure, influenced the religion of Jesus. Now, let us take the opinion of one who has earned the right to judge. To the Apostle Paul the central thing in Christianity was 'Jesus Christ and him crucified.' In that broken, dying form on the Cross he saw the

very image of God. To St. Paul that was the final revelation of the heart of the Father—the great secret unveiled. But to the Greek, he says, this Cross, which is the wisdom of God, is foolishness. For the Greeks sought after wisdom, the wisdom of their own philosophies, and what could a crucified man be but foolishness? How could His marred form be the image of their bright and beautiful deities, incapable of suffering? Socrates declares that there would be 'great impropriety' in the gods having either joy or sorrow; and Aristotle in his conception of them shuts them up in mere contemplation of themselves. Action is, for the most part, the life of man—only fitfully can he rise into contemplation. But contemplation is the very existence of a Divine Being. His blessedness is absolutely in self-contemplation, in thinking himself, if one may use such a phrase; he neither needs nor can pass beyond himself, because to do so would be a sign of imperfection. Hence the gods are incapable of any form of activity, and can hold no communication with mankind. 'What kinds of moral action are we to attribute to them? Are we to say that they do just actions? As if it were not absurd to think of the gods as making bargains with each other, and duly restoring what is entrusted to them, and the like. Or are we to say that they perform acts of bravery, enduring dangers and encountering risks, because it is noble to do so? Or again, have they to show liberality in their dealings? But to whom will they give anything, and what is the coin or currency that they use? Or are they

to be thought of as temperate? Would it not be a quaint praise of the gods to say that they have no bad impulses to check?' Now this, perhaps the loftiest Greek wisdom concerning the Divine nature, declares that it is the very blessedness of God that He is incapable of entering into human life in love or action. Obviously this would make the very idea of an Incarnation an absurdity. When Jesus says, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,' He contradicts absolutely this whole Greek conception of God. 'God,' He says in effect, 'is not thus so absorbed in love and contemplation of Himself that He is incapable of loving His creatures; He is not so lifted like a marble statue that He cannot suffer in order to redeem, for it is written, "I have made and I will bear."' Thus in His central teaching Jesus owes nothing to Greek wisdom, even at its highest; and if He is indeed the revelation of the Father, St. Paul's verdict upon Greek philosophy is perfectly true, 'The world by wisdom knew not God.'

We turn now to the mystic East. Buddha, 'the Enlightened One,' lived nearly six centuries before Christ; and many hold that Christianity has borrowed from Buddhism its leading doctrines. There are certainly some strange resemblances. In course of time legends gathered around Buddha's birth and infancy—that he descended from heaven of his own accord; that he was born without an earthly father; that angels assisted at his birth; that he was omniscient; that he wrought miracles. Again, he taught a universal religion—all men

might be saved simply by inward purification from evil.

Now, we must admit a certain superficial resemblance, and we must welcome the moral element in salvation. The central spirit of Buddhism, however, is pessimism and despair. The fundamental conviction is that existence in every form is sorrow. Salvation is to escape absolutely out of existence by killing out that desire of life which betrays us to continue living by the delusive hope that life will bring happiness. So long as this desire exists, it will fling us back into life after life for ever and for ever, and in each life we shall endure the penalty of evil done in all the preceding lives. We perhaps struggle up through lower forms into humanity ; and then, if we sin, we may be flung back to the brute or reptile and have to begin all anew. There is no forgiveness. As we sow, we reap for ever. The only escape is to kill the desire to live ; and as this desire depends on the amount of evil in us, the only way to kill it is to kill the evil. Evil is killed by these eight things : right views, right will, right effort, right action, right living, right speech, right thought, right meditation. He who follows this path of virtue sees things as they are ; renounces the desire to live ; and enters into Nirvana, the heaven of non-existence.

That Buddhism can foster a gentle and saintly soul is shown by Kipling's conception of the Llama in *Kim*, but it is worlds away from Christian thought and feeling. The only thought common to both religions is that virtue is salvation :

but by salvation Buddha meant the final extinction of life; Jesus meant 'life, and life more abundant': Buddha meant sinking into absolute unselfconsciousness—if I may use such a word; Jesus meant rising into a more and more vivid consciousness of self in God. Buddha starts from the idea that life is a curse; Jesus from the feeling that it is a Divine opportunity. Buddha denies the possibility of forgiveness—all debts must be paid to the uttermost farthing; forgiveness is the very atmosphere of Christ's living and dying. With Jesus virtue is the very power of life; with Buddha it is the sure weapon of suicide—not the poor thing we call suicide, which is only escape from this life, but complete annihilation. Finally, with Jesus God is the Father, infinitely tender, compassionate, loving. Buddha was an atheist, and rightly so, for it would be profanation to believe that a God created so horrible a world. I leave you to judge whether Christ borrowed His teaching from the great pessimist of the East.

At every point Christ's teaching transcends the ideas natural to imperfect human nature. The Jews are given a pure worship, and naturally consider themselves the exclusively favoured of Heaven. They look on the ordered universe, and their general conception of God is of a just Judge and Lawgiver. To the proud heart of man the creation of an empire, such as that of the Romans, is a natural ambition. The world is full of misery and imperfection, and the Greeks naturally imagine their gods as bright, self-sufficient beings far above

it. The pessimism of Buddha is equally natural, though to a different type of mind—that of the great Oriental thinker, who saw, as in certain moods we all see, no cure for the vast misery of the universe save in non-existence.

But Christ made His religion free to the whole world. He showed men the Father, as well as the Lawgiver. He realised that the only empire that can endure is one founded on spirit and on truth. He revealed God loving, suffering, dying for His creatures. He came in order to prove that joy is at the heart of the universe, and to give life more abundant. Whence came these new thoughts of God and man unless from some Divine inspiration? The heart of man had not conceived them, but God revealed them in Christ Jesus.

'And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.' —Job i. 12.

I do not intend to discuss the personality of Satan. It is enough at present to take him as standing for the power of evil, whatever that power may be. We know the successive blows of adversity which fell on Job—the loss of property, family, health, reputation and faith. It seems to us as if Satan, who will stand to us to-day for the power of evil circumstance, had certainly put forth his hand upon Job himself.

All men, as well as Job, are under this power, and the question of final importance is—how far can the power go? Can it invade and take possession of a man's whole being? Many declare it can. Man is simply the creature of circumstance—life and limb, body and soul, he is entirely at its mercy.

Now, the word 'circumstance' proves that this cannot be true. It means, as you know, the thing that stands round us—our environment or surroundings. If anything stands round us, obviously it must be different from the 'us.' There is in every one of us a central soul or self, which is assuredly not created by circumstances or surroundings. And

our question is, which will win in the struggle which is always going on between the two? Is it a foregone conclusion that this central self must suffer defeat? Our text assures us that this is not so. There are strict limits to the power of evil. It can indeed touch all that a man *hath*—but the man himself, the hidden central soul of him, it cannot touch unless with his own permission. In short, there is in every one of us a central citadel of our own personality which, if we so will it, no power of evil Satanic circumstance can ever capture and hold.

We find that Job was surrounded by five rings, so to speak, of circumstance, every one of which was attacked. Farthest out lay the circle of his property, and within that, and much nearer, his family; nearer still, his health; closer still, his character or reputation; and closest of all, his faith or forms of faith. With most of us it is through one or other or several of these circles that the power of evil seeks to strike the central vital self. But that attack need never be fatal. The central soul of every one of us may defy the Satanic power to wound it in any vital spot. The everlasting law of our warfare is: 'Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.'

Take the first circle of human circumstances—our property. In a day Job was stripped of all his prosperity—his vast flocks swept off by marauders. There is no use saying such a misfortune is nothing. Say what we please, some property is necessary to human life as we know it. Even St. Francis when

he stripped himself of all possessions could do so only because he threw himself for sustenance on the property of others, which when they gave it to him became his. I am not speaking, therefore, of absolute poverty, but of changes from affluence to comparative poverty. You know how some men meet such reverses — they simply cannot survive them : they fly to the poison or the pistol, or to the slower suicide of drink.

Now, this means that such men have identified the central self with their property until it has not enough separate existence to survive the loss of that property. But surely that central self ought to be secure no matter what wall of circumstance may fall around it; and, thank God, it often is secure. To some men, instead of the inner soul being crushed in the ruin, it is the very destruction which frees it —clears away what hid it from itself—and reveals the great reality that the human soul in its absolute nakedness is greater than all it ever possessed. Wealth often hangs like a beautiful golden curtain hiding God, man, and the soul itself ; and it is only when it is torn away that many a man begins to see the value of what is left—himself. Job, indeed, received back more than his first prosperity ; but be sure he never forgot the infinite value of his own soul, as revealed to him when he sat a ruined, poverty-stricken man. Satan touched all that he had, but himself lay beyond his power.

We come now to a closer circle of circumstance, our family and friends. And again, there is no use saying that it is nothing when, like Job's sons and

daughters, our very dearest are snatched away into the silence and darkness of death.

It is a vital question whether such a loss may not give the very soul a fatal wound. Some brood on it until it becomes a settled melancholy. Some strive to gain forgetfulness by excitement, dissipation, sin. Some seek escape from the intolerable loneliness by the dark door of death. But all this is Satan laying his hands, not merely on what a man hath, but on the man himself, and no man ought to allow that. Think how the central self might be ennobled, enriched, disentangled from all littleness and evil by a sorrow such as this. For, sometimes, nothing short of death can reveal to us the worth of those it takes away. They live with us, eat and drink with us, and we never know them. Then suddenly with one revealing touch of his bright hand Death draws aside the veil, and we see them —fair, immortal souls that cannot die. And in that sight we see ourselves. We, too, are immortal. The love that binds us is immortal. The very self is rescued, disentangled from the veils and nets of mortal things, in which it had not known that it was caught. This is the high Divine way of meeting the loss of bereavement—the central soul not only untouched by Satan's power, but raised, enfranchised, into a new life by Death itself.

And now come to another circle of circumstance, our health itself. Job was smitten with a loathsome and apparently incurable disease ; and the great question was whether Satan could thereby reach his very soul, and blight it with a disease more

deadly still. It is, indeed, the great question for every one on whom disease lays its wasting hand.

Now, the loss of health is a great loss. Nevertheless, when it comes we must ask ourselves whether any Satanic power can touch our inner soul by means of it, or whether we shall be able to use St. Paul's words and say, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' Very often, indeed, Satan does strike the soul through the body. Some sink down into a hopeless melancholy; nay, worse still, the melancholy sometimes leads to suicide, as we see from the newspaper every day. Let us pity rather than blame; but surely it would be better if we could meet the decay of the body with a stronger health of the soul.

And it is possible: nay, often we see it happening. A man goes on for years in strong physical health until he has half forgotten that he has a soul. And then that thoughtless bodily vigour breaks down; the noise of busy, eager life which drowned the still small voice within hushes itself outside the sick-room door, and for the first time the soul gets its chance of revealing itself. The weakness of the body disentangles the inner life from all that obscured it, sets it alone face to face with itself, and makes it claim its due place, dignity, and reverence.

We come now to a still closer circle of circumstance, a man's good name. The attempt to destroy this was part of Satan's attack on Job—even though it came through Job's friends. God called him a perfect and an upright man, but his friends knew

better. How, in a world governed by a good God, could a good man be visited with such awful blows of suffering? They must be strokes of God's vengeance for sin. And this is the burden of their conversation with Job. He must have some secret wickedness; let him confess and God will forgive him. Job refused: 'Will ye speak wickedly for God?' He was conscious of no such hidden wickedness. The suspicions of his friends were among his sorest trials.

And so to this day a man is often suspected innocently of some wickedness. He is wounded and hurt by blunt accusation, covert hint, or averted look. Few sorrows are more painful, and many a one grows bitter, sour, revengeful, or, worse still, thinks he may as well deserve the name of wickedness as get it innocently. And this is to allow the Satanic power to wound not his reputation merely, but *himself*—his central soul. For our reputation is not our self—it is only an atmosphere of our fellow-men's good opinion in which our inner self moves and breathes. And when they withdraw their good opinion it gives us an opportunity of falling back on our own inner man. Our true self is disentangled from public opinion—from friends and enemies alike—and retreats back to its own conscious integrity: nay, back further, to God Himself, and His verdict against that of man.

Scarcely anything so perfectly draws forth the separate individual self as this. Formerly, we were like a jelly-fish drifting on the waves of what men said of us, torn by their blame like the shell-less

creature on a rock. But now the inner man stands firm—independent of praise or blame—strong in its relation to God and its own integrity. The Satanic accusation has only given the inner self the chance of asserting its own independent life.

And now we reach the innermost circle of circumstance, so close that it seems not circumstance at all, but the very soul, the quick of the spirit—I mean faith, or rather the forms in which our faith has clothed itself. At first we imagine it is faith itself which is slain. Job's faith in God seemed to have received its death-blow. And so does it seem to many another. Shock after shock of calamity paralyses the power to believe, and the faith of youth dies in anguish and bitterness. When this happens, Satan has got within all circles of circumstance to the very soul itself.

But with Job it was far otherwise. Only the externals of faith were touched by Satan, the forms of thought in which Job had framed his conceptions of God—His justice, His administration of the world, His rewards and punishments, His dealings with good men and evil. These were the forms of his faith ; and when his experience of life broke them with stroke on stroke of pain, it seemed to him, as it has seemed to thousands more, as if the faith itself was shattered into fragments. Yet only the forms of faith were being broken—the faith which formed the essential man was growing stronger in the midst of the general ruin. Why was it that, even when accusing God of cruelty and injustice, there would arise, as by an irresistible instinct, the certainty that

all his doubts must be wrong? 'I know that my Redeemer liveth': 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' It is just because Satan never really penetrated further than the forms of faith—never touched the central soul of faith itself.

So Job passed triumphantly through the ordeal. It was not merely that his inner soul held its own and no more. It was more than conqueror. It came out as gold tried in the fire; the dross of forms of faith burnt away—the pure gold of the soul of faith remaining. 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.' All the hearsay about God gone for ever in the direct vision of Him; the man's central soul face to face with the Eternal Truth of things.

Surely, my friends, you see what I mean. All round us is the power of evil and evil circumstance. It sweeps away our property; it calls our friends into the darkness; it withers us like grass; it blasts our good name; it dashes in pieces the forms of our faith. All this it can do—it lies with us whether we will let it do more. In the midst of all these circles of circumstance will the essential central self stand up and say, 'All these are only circumstances—environment. I am independent of them. My essential life is in myself. I refuse to be conquered by them or to allow their coming to weaken or destroy me'?

Surely you see how essential it is that we should learn the worth and the power of this central self, learn to assert its royalty and its supremacy over all the enswathements of circumstances. No power

can conquer it from without: Satan may touch all it *hath*, but the man himself is beyond his power. You remember how Henley, with the touch of defiance of one who had suffered bitterly, 'thanks whatever gods may be for his unconquerable soul.'

> 'In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud, . . .
> . . . . . .
> 'It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul.'

'And there were certain Greeks . . . the same came therefore to Philip, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. . . .'—JOHN xii. 20-33.

IT is not easy to speak clearly of the Greek mysteries. A strange silence surrounded them. Their religious rites and ceremonies were known only to initiated persons, performed in the strictest seclusion, and to be spoken of on pain of severe penalties, sometimes death itself. They were the highest form of the religion of ancient Greece, the tradition, according to certain writers, of some great primeval revelation from God. Indeed, the initiated often declared that the mysteries of the Christian religion contained nothing but what was in them. There can be no doubt, I think, that the New Testament refers indirectly to them. St. Paul often uses the word 'mystery,' and it is impossible that he could have been ignorant of the existence of these rites. In 1 Corinthians, chapter ii., he talks of speaking 'the wisdom of God in a mystery' to them that are 'perfect'—the very word used in the Greek mysteries for the 'initiated' (τέλειοι), those admitted to the secret wisdom of the Greek religion. Jesus Himself says it was given to His disciples to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven,

while to others it was not given—as if the disciples were the initiated.

Yet there is absolutely no evidence that Christianity was in any real sense derived from the Greek mysteries, although in later times the Sacraments did become mysteries, with many resemblances to those of Greece. Let us, however, confine ourselves to this twelfth chapter of John. Certain Greeks came asking to see Jesus ; and the whole subject turns round His very peculiar saying when He heard of their desire : ' Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' Now, the greatest of all the Greek mysteries turned upon just a corn of wheat, its dying and living again. Professor Ramsey writes : ' The most holy and perfect rite in the Eleusinian Mysteries was to show an ear of corn mowed down in silence.' Surely it is impossible not to see in our Lord's words a direct reference to these mysteries. It is as if Christ, even before He saw these Greeks, thought of a figure familiar to them through their own religion. He did not draw the idea from their religion. His thought far transcends the Greek thought. Nevertheless, the metaphor of a corn of wheat is undoubtedly taken from the religion of those Greeks who came to see Him, though the fact that they came up to worship at the Passover seems to prove that they were among the many Gentiles more or less influenced by Judaism. The Greek mysteries were known all over the Eastern world. Galilee, in which Jesus spent by far the greater part of His life,

was full of Greek manners and customs. Decapolis (the very name is Greek) was a confederation of ten cities, in which there were very many inhabitants of Greek descent. We cannot suppose that a mind like Christ's would take no interest in a development of religion so arresting as the Greek mysteries, of which He must have heard many times.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were named from the town of Eleusis, about twelve miles north-west of Athens and situated on the bay famous from the battle of Salamis. Here grew up, from what we would call simply the harvest-home, the worship of two Greek deities, Demeter the Earth-Mother, and her daughter Persephone—the seed-corn, cast into the ground and dying, and then rising in the harvest to nourish men and animals.

All this grew into a myth. Persephone was gathering flowers when suddenly she was carried away by Pluto or Dis, god and king of the world of the dead. For nine days her mother searched for her in grief, and when she knew her fate she withheld the fruits of the earth until she should be restored to the upper air. In her disconsolate wanderings throughout the world she came to this town of Eleusis; and because she was kindly received there, she taught the people agriculture and gave fertility to the fields. In gratitude and commemoration, the Eleusinians built a great temple to the mother and daughter, around and in which grew up the worship enshrined in the mysteries.

The Festival was held every five years. At first,

only the Eleusinians could take part in it; then the Athenians were admitted; then citizens of all the states of Greece, even should they be at war with each other, for a sacred truce was proclaimed during the Festival. Then it was widened to admit the Romans. All barbarians, however, and all guilty of serious crime, were rigidly excluded. Then there was a course of preparation and initiation, though the details are uncertain. There were lesser mysteries to pass through, and some course of instruction given.

The great Festival was held in September, and lasted nine days, symbolic of the nine days of Demeter's search for her daughter. A great procession was formed in Athens composed of the instructed men and women, who had previously purified themselves in the sea. This procession set out in the evening to go by the Sacred Way to Eleusis—a way lined with tombs, temples, and shrines at which the pilgrims worshipped. It was night when they reached Eleusis, and the crowd scattered along the shore and over the plain bearing torches, to commemorate the Earth-Mother's search for her daughter. The crowning act of the worship was the great mystery revealed in the Temple of Demeter. Sir James Frazer says: 'The roof was supported by six rows of columns, seven columns in each row. . . . Eight tiers of steps . . . ran all round the chamber . . . on which the initiated probably sat watching the performance of the mysteries in the body of the hall. . . . About three thousand people could find room on them. . . . The body of the hall may have been screened by curtains

from the spectators sitting in darkness on the tiers of the seats that ran all round it, till suddenly the curtain rose and revealed the vast hall brilliantly illuminated, with the gorgeously attired actors in the sacred drama moving mazily in solemn procession or giddy dance out and in amongst the forest of columns that rose from the floor of the hall, while the strains of grave or voluptuous music filled the air. Then, when all was over, the curtain would as suddenly descend, leaving the spectators in darkness and silence, with nothing but the memory of the splendid pageant that had burst upon them and vanished like a dream.'

The pageant was composed, apparently, of dramas of Demeter and her daughter, accompanied by sounds and sights which by their very mystery shook the souls of the spectators. As Porter says : ' Strange and amazing objects presented themselves ; sometimes the place they were in seemed to shake round them, sometimes appeared bright and resplendent with light, and then again covered with black darkness and horror ; . . . sometimes terrible apparitions astonished the trembling spectators.' Then those who were to be finally initiated were shown one by one certain sacred objects, especially connected with the sacred ear of corn. They touched them, even kissed them, and departed crying, ' I am free.'

And all this had gathered to itself deep moral meanings concerning purification from guilt, and death, and resurrection from the dead—as in the symbolic corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying and rising again. The sights and sounds

and what they meant were too sacred to be lightly spoken of. They are said to have had a deep influence for good on many of the initiated. They were believed to assure entrance into the Elysian Fields. Sophocles says: 'Thrice blessed are those who have seen these rites before their descent into Hades: for they alone will have a future life—the rest will find nothing but pain'—applying, be it noted, the word 'life' only to a life of blessedness, as the New Testament seems to disassociate the Eternal Life of the good from the Eternal Existence of the evil. And Socrates, though himself uninitiated, speaks in the *Phaedo* of the mysteries as 'parables' showing that 'whoever comes to death uninitiated and profane will be in the mire; while he that has been purified and initiated shall dwell with the gods.' We often think of the joyousness of the ancient Greeks, as if they lived in a world of perpetual sunshine and happiness. The mysteries are one sign among many that this was but one side of their life. Even the joy of their harvest-home darkens into anxious questionings of sin and punishment: how guilt is to be expiated, the soul to be purified; the fears that haunt the unseen world; how heaven is to be secured after death. And all these questionings gather round a corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, and rises again into life and fruitfulness.

Now turn to Christ's conception of all these. Some think that the Greek mysteries influenced the Christian religion greatly; I see chiefly the contrasts between the two.

Take the general conception of death. To the Greek, death was a terror from which we must seek escape; the other world a dim, shadowy place, where the shades wandered feebly and without joy. 'When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail by impassable streams,' says the dying Meleager of Swinburne, speaking of his future life. To Christ, death was the positive means to a larger, stronger, fuller life. The corn of wheat dies in order to bring forth much fruit. Death is not something to be escaped from by a mystery, a religious rite. It is the very means by which we enter into a wider life.

> 'I lay in dust life's glory dead,
> And from the ground there blossoms red
> Life that shall endless be.'

Hence arises a second difference. We saw that in the Greek mysteries the process of escape is by a knowledge of the mind and a spectacle of the senses — an intellectual and dramatic initiation. But the Christian initiation is a deeply ethical one —not of the mind but of the heart and will. It is simply the sacrifice of self and selfishness. Christ reached the higher form of the heavenly life by dying on the Cross; and He demands that His followers also take up the Cross, declaring that to save life we must lose it. There is a world of difference between escaping from the fear of death by a dramatic spectacle, and escaping by offering up life for some higher cause. Unhappily, even into Christianity there crept the old Greek

idea of escaping from evil by means of dramatic spectacles, mysteries of the faith, spectacular sacraments. These are lapses back into the ritual of the Greek mysteries—in spirit, if not entirely in form. They are foreign to the simple, natural spirit of Christ Jesus.

Again, we saw that the Greeks confined their mysteries, and therefore salvation, to a comparatively small circle. At first the Eleusinians alone could take part in them ; then the Athenians were admitted ; then Greeks from every state ; then Romans. Thus the narrow circle of the cultured, the intellectual, the civilised world could alone hope for salvation. The whole barbarian world was excluded. There was no such limit in Christ's salvation. In this passage He says, ' I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,' and St. Paul only echoes this when he intentionally sweeps away all these Greek limitations by declaring that in Christ, the new man, ' there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ is all, and in all ' (Col. iii. 11).

Once more, the Greek mysteries were not open to sinners. They were for those who had first purified themselves by their own efforts. It was considered scandalous by the heathen philosophers that Christianity invited sinners to their communion, whereas other religions admitted the pure alone.[1]

The Greeks did not believe in the possibility of

[1] See also ' The Foolishness of God,' p. 165.

saving sinners. Chesterton says that the Pagan and Stoical feeling was :

> ' 'Tis not in mortals to command success ;
> But we 'll do more, Sempronius—we 'll deserve it ' ;

but that Christianity released men from this inexorable working out of their own salvation, and taught them to say, ' 'Tis not in mortals to deserve success ; but we 'll do more, Sempronius—we 'll obtain it.' The Greek mysteries were simply to save the good and holy from unhappiness in the world to come ; and in this we have one of their fundamental differences from the Christian faith, which says, ' This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' ' To save sinners '—no hierophant of the Greek mysteries would ever have dreamt of saying anything like that.

This brings us to the crowning contrast. It is our faith that Christ is the very Son of God—a Divine Being who came into this world, took our sins and sicknesses and even our death upon Himself for us, to be able to forgive our sins and make us just and true and loving like Himself. This is fundamental to the Christian religion, because the whole conception of God, man, and salvation hangs upon it. There was nothing really resembling this in the Greek religion. True, the Greeks thought of their gods as sometimes laying aside their divine glories and clothing themselves in human forms—but not to share human sorrow and bear human sin by dying for the race : they visited earth often for

some pleasure, perhaps evil, of their own. Take one of the purest and most beautiful of these legends. Persephone has no thought of devoting herself in death for the salvation of man. She is caught away to the other world in the midst of her girlish pleasures, while gathering flowers, and utterly against her will. In Hades, although she is its Queen, she wails for the upper earth and its flowers. Her mother, Demeter, leaves Olympus, it is true, but it is in anger for the loss of her daughter; and in her resentment she smites the earth with the curse of barrenness until she is restored to her. In short, so far as the conception of deity is concerned, there is no resemblance between Christianity and the Greek mysteries. On the contrary, although, when these Greeks desired to see our Lord, He used the figure familiar in their mysteries, yet He was most deeply conscious of the great and fundamental differences. To the Greek religion, death was a thing to be feared; to Him, it was the very means of life—the dying of the seed-corn being the process by which life everlasting became possible.

And so salvation was not to be found through ideas of the intellect or dramatic spectacles such as were presented in the Temple at Eleusis, but by serving others, by being, in St. Paul's words, 'crucified with Christ,' and sharing the fellowship of His sufferings—in short, by losing life in order to attain to the resurrection of the dead. And this salvation was free for all men—barbarians, Scythians, slaves. It was not confined to a handful of the human race, the Greeks, and intellectuals whom

they cared to admit. It was not limited to the righteous who needed no repentance; it was offered to sinners, the sick in soul who need a physician. Above all, such a salvation was possible only to a God who came to earth, not to please Himself, as did the Greek divinities, but to take the whole sinful, suffering, despairing world upon His heart, and save it by dying for it.

'And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'—Acts i. 10, 11.

The scene is the Mount of Olives, for ever sacred to His holy memory. Many a time have His feet climbed the hillside after a long day's work in Jerusalem. Many a time, wearied with the hostility of priest and Pharisee, has He been glad to escape to the home in Bethany to rest His soul in its companionship. Now from Bethany He is passing away to the long rest of His Father's house. For the last time He has walked out from Jerusalem in familiar conversation with His disciples, as He used to do before the strange Cross of Calvary broke their companionship. It seems like a renewal of the old days. The disciples begin to hope once more. After all, it may be that their Master is at last going to stay with them. True, His comings and goings have of late been sudden and hard to understand. But to-day, as they climb with Him the old familiar path to Bethany, as they listen to His voice, as the little village they know so well comes in sight, their spirits rise, their hopes revive. They even venture

to ask if the time has at last come for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel—still dreaming, evidently, of political instead of spiritual power.

Then suddenly, He raises His hands and blesses them, and without one farewell hand-clasp or kiss He is parted from them. Up from the earth that holds them fast, up past the topmost palms of Olivet, up through the clear, bright air, up to the white curtain of the clouds, He is borne away from them, until the bright cloud parts and closes again, and He is gone. The disciples are grievously oppressed by a strange sense of loneliness. Several times, indeed, since His Resurrection has Christ suddenly vanished from their eyes ; but always in a way that left them free to look for His return. But now, nowhere on earth, among the streets of Jerusalem, on the sides of Olivet, or by the sea of Galilee, do His feet linger. He is gone, and has left ' nothing but wondrous parting and a blankness.'

Little wonder that those who loved Him should gaze with grief and hope struggling in their hearts—half expecting to see the cloudy curtain unfold and restore their Master to their side. And then a voice comes, ' Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? '—' Why forget the earth and your work here ? Gazing into the clouds will not save the world ; and although He will come again, it will not be thus that you will bring Him.'

These words are full of practical wisdom. There has been throughout the ages an unhealthy religious state in which even good men fall into the error of gazing overmuch into heaven, to the neglect of earthly

duties, although it is true that many of us forget about heaven entirely—our souls cleave to the dust.

This false spirituality may grow out of our griefs and disappointments. Thus the disciples had lost their strongest, dearest friend, and could not tear away their eyes from the cloud that hid Him. We may be sure that the voices of the two men were soft with comfort and their eyes bright with sympathy, and in this spirit of sympathy must we speak to those who have fallen into false spirituality through sorrow. Many of us have seen friends pass out of our sight—but the cloud that received them was no white, fleecy brightness floating in the summer sky, but the dark mists of death. It will not do to say, 'Tears mean rebellion against God's will.' No: 'Let grief be her own mistress still,' 'To weep or not to weep.' Christ Himself wept over His friend's grave. Many a man, many a woman, is looking for ever to the dead days of early life when children and friends filled the heart with sunshine. The eyes that looked into theirs, the hands that so often clasped their hands, the faces that were all the world to them—all are gone into the common dust. Dare we deride their sorrow by any pious phrase about this being God's will? It is not the will of that God who sent His Son to abolish death, which is the work of the devil. There is a noble way of gazing into heaven. Many a one never thinks seriously of the world to come until his wife, his child, his friend, passes into that world. Heaven has hitherto been a foreign country of which he seldom thinks until some one he loves goes to live there. But now

every friend he has lost becomes a 'treasure in heaven'; and where his treasure is, there his heart is also. And thus the thought of heaven enters into his whole life—his work, his interests, his amusements—until he really lives in a heaven on earth.

There is, however, a wrong looking towards heaven, a grief which loves to nurse itself until it becomes half unreal, which narrows the heart and cramps the energies in a constant turning back to the past. Such an attitude inevitably kills the power of true, manly work, and, in the end, manliness. We have a right to say, 'Why stand for ever gazing up into heaven? Rouse yourself; be a man; "count it crime to mourn for any overmuch"; while you are mourning you might be helping by means of your riches or your ability to save lives as dear to others as those of your dead were to you; turn to God's work in the world, instead of constantly brooding over your desire to die and see your lost ones once more. You will have a better chance of seeing them again if you do the duties of life with both hands, earnestly. Do not desert from the battlefield because your comrades have fallen out by the way.'

They laid his soldier-comrade down
To rest, his warfare o'er;
He thought upon a little town
Would never see him more.

A little kirk upon a hill,
Far in the cold, grey North,
A little kirkyard, green and still,
That looks across the Forth.

Would he too find a nameless grave
Beside this foreign deep,
Far from the dear familiar wave
By which his fathers sleep ?

What matter, wheresoe'er we lie,
Within the wide earth's bounds,
So we can meet our Captain's eye,
When the last bugle sounds ?

He laid a branch upon the bank
For him who slept below,
Then turned and stept into his rank,
His face toward the foe.

There is another way in which we may gaze into heaven in a wrong spirit. As the disciples gazed upward, they feared what might happen to themselves. So long as Christ was with them, He could solve their difficulties and inspire them with courage. Now, like sheep without a shepherd, like children without a father, they were henceforth to be unprotected. They could only escape from their fears by feeling that their Master had vanished from their sight to draw closer in the spirit, but they cannot realise His promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

Now, many of us never think of Christ as a present friend. It was the tendency of the past to think only of the Cross, forgetting that the Cross means death and that the Resurrection and Ascension must complete its meaning. 'If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain.' And many of us still think of Christ as having lived His life nineteen

hundred years ago, or else we think of Him as far away in Heaven.

My friends, Christ has not forsaken one of His people. Whatever He was to St. John or St. Peter, that is He to us if we trust Him. 'He is not far from every one of us.' St. Paul says, 'Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ from above). 'The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.' 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' Not one pang or joy of earth has He forgotten; not one purpose of His life or death has He abandoned. 'This same Jesus' Who toiled and prayed and wept and suffered is living to-day as surely as when He trod the earth. Unless we are sure that He is unchanged and unchangeable, that He is by our side in every turn of life as really as He was beside the disciples, unless we live daily in the power of this, our life will never be pure with glad obedience, we will never be sure that He cares for us, that He wishes to perfect us, that He is guiding our lives. Therefore, why strain your eyes to pierce the clouds? The cloud that hides Christ from us is in ourselves, in our love of self, our devotion to the world. Let us ask God to send the wind of His Spirit, that bloweth where it listeth, to sweep it aside, and then we will see Christ beside us at every step of life's journey. Why stand gazing up into heaven for a Christ whom we may find in our own hearts?

Again, let us guard against thinking that the ascended Christ exercises no kingship over the earth and its nations. Doubtless in their desolation the

disciples despaired of any kingdom ever being restored to any Israel; and there are many, even in these days of optimism, to whom Christ's Kingdom comes so slowly that it seems not to be coming at all. We see the evils of city life, the dishonesties of trade, the very bread by which we live contaminated, the rich prospering through the miseries of the poor, the hypocrisies that lurk in all classes of society, the world apparently converting the Church instead of the Church converting the world. Yet, is our age really worse than many preceding ages? Think of the world to which Christ came—the Roman tyranny, the Jewish falling away from their high ethical position into casuistry and disunion, the pagan licentiousness, the barbarian darkness—and then ask if Christianity has been a failure. Surely it has quickened literature and art, science and politics, and made man's conscience sensitive to the difference between good and evil. And Christ is with us as He was with the early ages. He is still 'the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Every act of true charity, generosity, chivalry, self-sacrifice, comes from His Spirit; every emotion of purity, of indignation against injustice or hypocrisy, is a pulse from His infinite heart; every great thought that widens the minds of men is a stream from the fountain of His eternal wisdom; every yearning of any lowest, most degraded man or woman after the Father of mercy is the work of Him who came to save the lost. O ye of little faith, why should you ever imagine that Christ has abandoned the world He died to save?

You cannot see how He is saving it, because you are not helping Him to save it. Set your hand to some unselfish work for others, and your eyes will be opened to see the conquering Christ, not in some distant heaven beyond the clouds, but here and now—ay, in every poor mother who sacrifices herself daily for her helpless child. This same Jesus is coming again, generation after generation, in every thought, emotion, deed of man or woman that ennobles and purifies the world.

Again, the bright-robed messengers declared, 'This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven!' The Apostles, including St. Paul, seem to have expected the Second Coming in their own day. Christians were to hold themselves ready for the great event. Even marriage, right in itself, might bind the soul down by earthly ties. St. Paul's Thessalonian converts at last became unable to settle to their daily duty, and the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written to show that duty was the best preparation for the day of the Lord.

And so it is to this day. Few Christians now expect Christ's coming in the clouds. Many deny that He will ever come, or put His coming far off in the future. But perhaps already, while we sleep, His step is beginning to sound through the night of time. One thing is clear—that, whenever comes that last day of the world which both religion and science foretell, yours and mine must come within the next twenty or forty or sixty years. In youth or age, by sudden accident or slow

disease, somewhen and somehow He will come to each of us.

'It may be in the evening,
When the work of the day is done,
And you have time to sit in the twilight,
And watch the sinking sun,
And the long bright day dies slowly
Over the sea,
And the hour grows quiet and holy
With thoughts of Me;
While you hear the village children
Passing along the street,
Among those thronging footsteps
May come the sound of *My* feet:
Therefore I tell you—Watch
By the light of the evening star,
When the room is growing dusky
As the clouds afar;
Let the door be on the latch
In your home,
For it may be thro' the gloaming I will come.'

Jean Ingelow.

But whenever He come, the true preparation is by patient performance of duty.

Again, some say that Christianity is too much concerned with a future life. Many say, 'This fair green earth is our home, not some unknown, invisible heaven. Are we to turn from the work of making this earth a better and happier place? Is that religion? If so, we will have nothing to do with it.' Yes, but this is not Christ's religion. He lived as a man among men, did not despise the

present for the sake of the future, went about doing good. His thought of Heaven gave solemnity to every earthly duty. And so into every present duty His followers must infuse the spirit of the eternal future, until by the golden chain of daily work are bound together earth and heaven, present and future. Mere sentimentalism in religion is irreligious. It is one of Satan's ways of clothing himself as an angel of light. No man can live without sentiment, without love, reverence, joy. But sentimentalism is sentiment divorced from action. It is spiritual dissipation, and therefore spiritual ruin. Let us get a large and healthy view of this world as a sphere in which to do God's work. Our religion is worthless if it does not rescue our homes, interests, and occupations from meanness and selfishness. Put your sentiments into duty, and they will remain strong and healthy. The earth is calling for your work—your fellow-men need your help—the world expects you to leave it better than you found it. Therefore come down from your Mount of Olives, cease gazing into the clouds for Christ, do your duty for His sake in your homes, in your business—and behold, you will find Christ walking by your side, and dwelling in your soul, and you will need to look for no heaven in the clouds, 'For, behold, the kingdom of heaven is within you.'

The Simplicity of Faith

'The word is nigh thee.'—DEUT. xxx. 11-14; ROMANS x. 6-8.

THOUGH I have read these two passages together, I do not intend to examine their relation to each other. St. Paul does not quote the passage in Deuteronomy with strict accuracy; and he makes so strange a use of it, that it would need a separate sermon to examine that alone. Yet the general idea of both passages is clear. It is that God lays on man no impossible task; religion and morality are not so hidden that they cannot be known, or so inaccessible that they cannot be reached. The things necessary for life and salvation are to be found in the familiar round of life, in our very selves: 'the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.'

In all ages humanity has conceived religion as a great mystery to be discovered only by searching heaven and earth. Moses found that idea in his day. We find it as surely in ours.

It takes three great forms among ourselves. At the one extreme we have the superstitious form, Spiritualism. Not satisfied with the revelation God has given us in Scripture, some think they can themselves discover a better revelation. To them

the word is very far away, hidden in the almost inaccessible region of another world. To find it they must ascend to heaven, or descend to the abyss —establish between the two worlds some slow, imperfect communication by table-rapping and otherwise. Many of them are quite sincere, and the anguish that often drives the bereaved to Spiritualism should touch our pity. Let any sane man, however, compare the revelations thus gained with that word of Scripture which is nigh us, even in mouth and heart, and decide which is the more valuable towards right living.

Now turn to the scientific form. The science of our day virtually says that the word is not nigh us. It raises doubt about every question, moral and religious. It declares that we must search Heaven and earth before we can be sure of anything. It returns from its own search and says, 'If there be a God, we have not found him in the heavens above or on the earth beneath.' If you appeal to your own heart, and say the word is there, 'What,' science says, 'is your own heart?—what your conscience, your soul? Is there any soul? The atoms which compose you *de*compose, and the soul—if there be one—may perish with them.' Thus, with all its great services to mankind, science makes religion hard and inaccessible to many.

Thirdly, our text is denied by a widespread search among the religions of the world. When Moses said, 'Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us?' he meant to warn the Israelites

against imagining they could import a better religion from some distant land.

Now, not a few of us seek some better religion overseas ; or at least spend time comparing the religions of various nations with one another and with Christianity. I say nothing against the study of comparative religions in itself. Our religion can stand comparison, which may even help to reveal its inherent truth. Nevertheless, the practical effect often is to make religion a thing not nigh even in the heart, but far off across the sea. A constant searching among distant religions tends to make our own religion distant as they are ; and we end feeling that all are equally good—equally near, equally far.

These are some of the ways in which those outside the Church make the revelation of God and duty seem hard and inaccessible. But many inside the Church do exactly the same thing. Did the Law of Moses itself remain the plain and easy commandment he declared it to be ? Far from it. Gradually there grew round it a thickening crust of comments, interpretations, refinements—traditions of men which often made void the commandments of God. It grew too complicated for the people to know it : as the Pharisees said, ' this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.' Next, it grew too hard to be performed. St. Peter calls it ' a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.' In other words, the later traditions made the word far off to the Jewish people—' a heavy burden and grievous to be borne.'

And this happens in Christianity—for Rabbinism

in its lower form is no monopoly of the Jews—when the simplicity that is in Christ is changed into a complicated system of doctrine. Take the Person of Christ, or the doctrine of the Trinity, or that of the Atonement. These have frequently been so overlaid with traditional interpretations that the underlying truth was obscured for ordinary people. Or again, the Bible itself is the subject of controversy. This very book of Deuteronomy: when was it written—by Moses himself, or centuries later? Over many of the Biblical books this controversy is raging among scholars: till many feel sadly that the word is not nigh unto them, that they cannot be sure that there is any word at all until scholars have settled all difficulties.

Is religion, then, this hard, distant, inaccessible thing? The spiritualist says we must wait till a path is discovered between this world and the next; the scientist, till science has explored heaven and earth; the student of comparative religion, till all religions are examined and compared; the theologian, till you assent to the mysteries of doctrine; the higher critic, till he has settled all problems of authorship, dates, texts, and so forth.

Very good, my friends: if we must wait till all these things are done, religion is not for us. Our generation and many another will be gone from the earth before then. Is it credible that God has made the great things of religion and morality so desperately hard to know? I refuse to believe anything so dishonouring to Him. I still believe that Moses is right when he declares: 'This com-

mandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard (wonderful) for thee, neither is it far off. . . . But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.' We do not need to wait till all questions in heaven and earth are solved before we begin to live aright.

To begin with, the word of God is so nigh that it is in our own hearts. We draw a distinction between natural and revealed religion. Nevertheless, the great fundamental truths of revealed religion are also those of natural religion. God in the Bible does not approach us with a set of truths and commands entirely foreign to your nature and mine. They are already in our hearts ; some sense of right and wrong responds to them ; the soul within us is made on the same plan. Take the two commandments which our Lord singled out as those on which hang all the Law and the Prophets : 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind . . . and thy neighbour as thyself' : is there not something in the human heart which recognises these as right and reasonable ? You may indeed *argue* yourself into thinking that no God exists ; but far beneath all argument there lives in every human soul something which says, 'God is, and God is good and worthy to be loved.'

This, surely, is true of every human being. There, in the centre of our nature, is the witness to religion and duty—a sense of God's authority over our wills and lives. The Bible speaks no word of some

foreign tongue, but one already in our own hearts. You and I may be so foolish and wicked as to refuse to listen to it—we may say we cannot be sure it is Divine until all the books of the Bible are examined; but in doing so we violate our own nature. For the word is in our hearts—the inborn witness to the word outside.

Once more, it is nigh us by the very construction of our daily life, 'that we may do it.' For, however perplexing the intellectual problems of our day may be, the great circle of human experience remains the same in all ages—the common joys and sorrows, love and friendship, daily work, helpfulness to those who need our help. These things are not far off—the word of daily duty is very nigh us, in the work to which we rise morning by morning, in the duties to our fellows which living with them inevitably brings. No man need excuse himself by saying he must wait till all questions are cleared up by scientists, scholars, theologians. All the great duties of life are at our very doors—simple things which we pass by because they are too simple. 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Many of us are waiting for some great deed to do, some mysterious secret to unveil, while all the time, in the familiar circle of daily life and work, the word is nigh us, in our mouth and in our heart, that we may do it.

And it is nigh us in this also—that all that is necessary for obedience is faith. St. Paul in

Romans says that 'the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise.'

Now, faith in Christ is to some a word by no means nigh them, and this because they quite misunderstand what faith is. They think it means a clear mental understanding of the great doctrines which gather round Christ: the Incarnation—the union in Him of humanity and divinity—the Trinity—the meaning of His death and resurrection. Many, it is true, think they care nothing for such doctrines; but their determination to prove, for instance, that it scarcely matters whether Christ be human or Divine shows that their minds are, in reality, at work upon the question. Now, I do not say we must never face such problems; but I do say that we can have true faith in Christ even with all such problems unsolved. For faith is not clear knowledge, but trust. Here is a child just beginning to think. His little mind is greatly puzzled about his father—he does not understand why he goes to business, or what business is, or where it is. Imagine the child saying, 'I can have no faith in my father until I understand all his life; I cannot trust him until I clear up to my own mind those things in his conduct which perplex me.'

No child is so foolish as that; yet grown men say precisely this about Christ—we cannot trust Him until we understand Him completely. Let no one delude himself thus. Grant that a thousand mysteries gather round Christ—yet it is just as true that there is much that is not mysterious at all, that even a child can feel to be true and good and worthy

of faith: His teaching, His faithfulness to God's will, His refusal to bend to that of man, His pity for the sad and sinful, His love for the poor and helpless, His constant self-sacrifice. If you knew nothing more of Him, is not that enough to silence foolish questionings—to make you feel that such an One is worthy of your faith?

When we demand the solution of all problems before we will believe, too often the real reason is some moral unwillingness to be convinced. Faith is no such hard task as we make out—it is the virtue of all humble and childlike souls, who trust goodness when they see it. And just because faith is not the conquering of all mysteries, because it is the quiet trust of a child believing where it cannot know, therefore 'the word is nigh thee even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.' Religion cannot be made easier, simpler, more accessible. It needs absolutely nothing but childlike trust in One we feel to be infinitely wiser, kinder, better than ourselves, and whose example we are ready to follow through life and death. Faith is the simplest possible condition of salvation. The word cannot be brought nearer to any human soul than that.

My dear friends, be not misled by the tendency to make our religion hard and inaccessible. There is no need to wait for some new revelation, or till every problem of the old is solved. Everything of real value is very near to us—in those moral and religious instincts which are inborn in every human soul, in those familiar duties which lie at our feet, in that simple faith, that clinging trust in Christ,

which is possible to every childlike heart. It was this lesson that Francis Thompson learnt when he was starving in the streets of London :

'Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars !—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

. . . . . .

'But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry ;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

'Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems ;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames !'

The Greatest Claim ever Made

'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.'—MATT. xxiv. 35.

THIS is one of the great sayings of our Lord, and nothing but over-familiarity could ever blind us to the marvel of it. Strictly speaking, its application might be confined to the tribulations which were to gather round the doomed city and temple. But it is equally true of all Christ's teaching, whether in words or in life. What He claims is that the elements of His religion are eternal, more enduring than the fabric of the material universe. And this claim is made by One Who was known as a village carpenter—a poor wandering preacher—One Who knew He was about to be crucified by His own countrymen as unworthy to live. No more amazing words have ever been uttered, and the great question is—are they true?

We all know that there is a widespread doubt of their truth. I know a young man of high education, serious and thoughtful, who hesitates to join the Christian Church lest some time he should discover another religion so far superior to that of Christ as to supersede it.[1] And many hold that His words *have*

[1] This was the young man who later, in the stress of the Great War, learnt to know God as a friend; see "The Best is yet to Be."

actually passed away—that the Christian religion is an outworn, discredited system of thought.

Is this really so? Are Christ's conceptions of God and man, sin and righteousness, immortality and judgment, so out of harmony with human nature and its necessities that we must, as honest men, seek for something nearer the truth of things? Begin with God Himself. There are, of course, those who foreclose the whole question by blank atheism; and to these it is enough to reply that while they can never *prove* that there is no God, the virtually universal instinct of mankind asserts that there is. Even Voltaire, the high priest of French scepticism, held that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent one—so inherent in our nature is the need for a Supreme Being to worship and love. The only question worth considering seriously is whether the God presented to us by Jesus Christ is One Whom we can love.

Now, Christ reveals to us a God Who suffers with and for His creatures. I know of no other religion which presents a suffering God. There is, I believe, in certain forms of the Japanese religions a faint conception of such an One, which is said to have been taken from Christianity itself. But the idea of a suffering God is peculiar to the Christian faith, and therefore it is the faith which is conquering the world. Nothing appeals to the universal heart so deeply as the Cross of Christ, which means the suffering of God: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' Pagans shape God in forms of terror. To the Mohammedan He is an inexorable Fate. To

the ancient Greek the gods were lovers of their own pleasure, 'careless of mankind.' Even to the Hebrew, Jehovah was, before all else, an infinite King and Magistrate, high and lifted up above the frail creature of His hand. Hence these conceptions of the Deity have passed or will pass away before the Father of men Whose image hangs upon the Cross of Calvary. The world will never outgrow that conception of Deity. It will never conceive a God more beautiful, or One Who appeals more deeply to the forlorn heart of man. Heaven and earth may pass away, but this God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, suffering, agonising, dying to redeem His sinful creature—this will never pass away in time or in eternity.

We must, however, guard ourselves against thinking that, since God thus suffers for us, His love is a mere good nature, whose chief object is to save us from every painful consequence of wrong-doing. Turn to the words of Christ, and you will find among them some of the sternest ever spoken by human lips. He came, not to judge but to save, yet judgment was to Him one of the greatest of all realities—a final and inevitable discrimination of men according to moral character. Is this, then, a word which will pass away? Is sin a delusion, and conscience a false accuser? This is precisely what many say in these days. What theologians call sin they declare is simply defect, no more to be censured than a lame foot or a bad memory. Very good: how do you account for the condemnation we pronounce on ourselves for telling a lie or

doing an unkindness? We have no such sense of moral blame for the lame foot or the poor memory. No; that sense of the reality of a moral judgment which runs through Christ's words is echoed by our own conscience, and therefore it can never pass away, just because there does exist an eternal difference between right and wrong, which no sophistry can finally argue out of existence.

This brings us to another of the words of Christ, a series of words arising out of this reality of sin—salvation, repentance, regeneration; in short, 'ye must be born again.' Of the necessity and possibility of this great renewal of nature the teaching of Christ is full; but both necessity and possibility are often denied. Some say that it is not needed. Sin is good in the making. Man's nature is in the process of growth; let it alone, and it will outgrow its defects. Others say, again, that a radical change of nature is an impossibility: evil, through habit, becomes part of our very being. This is sometimes the despairing cry even of a prophet: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.' Christ's teaching asserts both the necessity and the possibility of this great change; indeed, He assumes both in all His dealings with men and women whom He met. Now, let your own conscience speak. Will it not say that nothing less than such a change can ever set the world right? The ever-revolving cycle of crimes and sins in the midst of which we live, the consciousness of our own

failings, both tell us of the need of some great regenerating change. And Christ declares that this is possible, and the experience of millions rescued from the power of evil proves that He spoke the truth. When will the world outgrow this great word of Christ of the need and the chance of a new heart, a new spirit, a new life?

Turn to the great word Righteousness, especially social Righteousness. Righteousness, to Christ, includes more than justice in the bare and legal sense. It includes a generous and kindly outlook on the lives of others, an effort to put ourselves in their place, to treat them as we should wish to be treated. Social righteousness cannot mean less than this. Certainly it does not mean less in our Lord's life and teaching. His compassion on the multitudes, His beatitude on the poor, His feeding of the hungry, His parables of the Good Samaritan, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Last Judgment, all reveal what He meant.

Now, has our modern society discovered any substitute for this social righteousness of Christ Jesus? Many, indeed, are tried, and the present state of the community in this Christian land shows that they are only substitutes and means of evasion. What is all the social unrest, that sets class against class in every land, but the sure and bitter proof that Christ's word does not pass away: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you'? This is the one eternal condition on which the peace and harmony of communities can be built.

Again, if there is any word of Christ's of which there can be no doubt, it is surely that in which He makes Himself necessary to every human soul. 'I am the good shepherd'; 'I am the true vine, and ye are the branches . . . severed from me ye can do nothing'; 'I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'; 'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst'; 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'

Will this word, then, ever pass away? Is Christ as necessary now for us as He was long ago for His first disciples? There do seem to be people who imagine that they have actually outgrown Christ, and have become 'little Christs' to themselves. Alas! how little such souls must know of the length and breadth and depth and height of the love that passeth knowledge; of the treasures of wisdom that are hid in Christ; and of the weakness, ignorance, and pride of heart which make it possible for them to dream that they can be independent of Him Who says: 'Without me ye can do nothing'! Those who have ever truly known Christ know this beyond all doubting, that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, of all they are or ever hope to be. When heaven and earth pass away, and even when He has delivered the Kingdom to the Father, so that God is 'all in all,' He must be to them in some new and beautiful way, though no longer as Mediator

between God and the soul. Bread, Water, Light, Way, Truth, and Life: for there, as here, 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.'

'Must thou Char the Wood ere thou canst Limn with it?'

'And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'—Rev. vii. 13-14.

My subject this morning is tribulation and its uses. I know well the moment I named it some of you thought, 'Ah, here comes the string of weary, pious platitudes which never yet comforted one wounded human heart.' And indeed sometimes we cannot but feel that there is no comfort for our sorrow—none that we can see. I cannot hope, therefore, that my words will bring help to all, for I have no new, undreamt-of source of consolation to disclose: only the old hopes and faiths. And yet there may be one here, one there, to whom the old commonplaces of consolation may spring to life and power.

There is nothing essentially holy about suffering in itself. It is customary to say that it is the will of God. That is partly true and partly false. A great deal of suffering of every kind springs from sin, and is therefore the outcome of the will of the Evil One. Yet even here there is a Divine aspect of suffering. It is the penalty which God has

attached to sin, and in this sense is rightly attributed to His will. And it is penalty with a Divine and gracious purpose—to hedge in our path with sorrows, until we learn that sin is a rough and stony road, and leave it for ever. No consolation is greater than just this thought, that the sufferings, mental, moral, physical, which a man brings on himself do not lie outside the circle of God's providence and gracious purpose for him.

And that purpose is to purify us. It is only if we wash the robes of our life white that it fulfils its noble use. Many a one suffers, yet is but hardened and embittered. The word 'tribulation' 'is derived,' says Trench, 'from the Latin "tribulum," which was the threshing instrument or harrow, whereby the Roman husbandman separated the corn from the husks; and "tribulatio" in its primary significance was the act of this separation. But some Latin writer of the Christian Church appropriated the word and image for the setting forth of a higher truth; and sorrow, distress and adversity being the appointed means for the separation in men of whatever in them was light, trivial and poor from the solid and the true, their chaff from their wheat, he therefore called these sorrows and trials "tribulations"—threshings, that is, of the inner spiritual man, without which there could be no fitting him for the heavenly garner.' Tribulation, then, is suffering inflicted for a purpose—to separate the chaff from the wheat in our nature—or, to take the figure of our text, to wash the robes of our being white: 'What are these which are arrayed in white

robes? and whence came they? . . . These are they which are coming (lit.) out of great tribulation.'

One of the commonest forms of trial is in the circle of our physical life. We rightly count health of body a blessing. And yet if you were in trouble, pain, or doubt, it is seldom to the perfectly strong that you would go for help or sympathy. I am not blaming them; it is not a matter of blame at all. But I do say this—that perfect health is, almost of necessity, limited in its vision to the present visible world.

At first sight, disease and pain may seem only a narrowing of life. A peculiar pity gathers round the first beginnings of physical decay—when the light, firm step is arrested, and the clear eye dimmed with pain—pity that a figure so fair and buoyant cannot go on for ever unchanged. But all this gives the soul a chance; it forces the man to be more at home with himself, till by the very narrowing of his life his life is widened—he comes within sight of a world his eyes could not see till illness dimmed them. It is at night, when the garish veil of day is withdrawn, that we see the world of stars.

This is equally true of the loss of worldly fortune. Worldliness and selfishness seem almost excusable among those rich in this world's goods. It is easy to see how the poor, the down-trodden, the outcast, long for a fairer and happier world. Their lot in this world is so hard and colourless that their hearts have no temptation to rest here—'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.' But 'a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of

heaven.' Wealth makes this present world so pleasant that a man feels no need for any other. There is something narrowing in the very comforts and luxuries with which wealth surrounds his life—every sense soothed and gratified, the rude jars of life warded off, a world with a thousand lovely scenes of Nature, a thousand objects of Art and interests of Science. I have a peculiar kind of admiration for the rich man who is genuinely religious, as for one who has broken through the magic spell of the splendour of the world, and stands a free man in the midst of its enchantments. But it is not all who can do this, and when God sees they are worth tribulation He strips their wealth away. Then, in the sad and bitter facing of poverty, in the new struggle for existence, they learn how much was their essential self, how much mere trapping and adornment. Sometimes the heart aches with dull pain, sometimes it rises in passionate rebellion against the change—and yet, whenever it comes, it means that God is holding open the very gate of Heaven, giving a new chance of seeing wherein true life consists.

There is a darker form of tribulation—the loss of friends by death. Earthly love is very dear and sweet. There is something restful in the meeting of eyes, the touch of hands, the feeling that all is understood, even when nothing is said. It is very natural for us to plant this Paradise of earthly love and wall it in from the world. And there is something divine in it, for heavenly airs breathe round everything worthy of the name of love. And yet often we never understand the great meaning of

love until those we love are removed beyond the reach of every sense. Only then do we realise how much we had, and how little we valued it. Our hearts rise up in a vain agony of regret—'If only we had known!'

> 'And she is gone; sweet human love is gone!
> 'Tis only when they spring to heaven that angels
> Reveal themselves to you; they sit all day
> Beside you, and lie down at night by you,
> Who care not for their presence—muse or sleep;
> And all at once they leave you, and you know them!
> We are so fooled, so cheated.'

I said our hearts rise in a vain agony of regret, but I said wrongly. It is *not* vain. Nothing is more powerful to change our life. Such regret lifts us into a world which we feel to be larger than any we had known before. A great sorrow always has this effect: it imparts something of its own greatness to us. Love itself, cut off from the narrowing influence of the senses, widens, and becomes a thing of pure spirit; and as friend after friend departs, there gather round the word Heaven the associations that used to gather round the word home.

There is still another tribulation often necessary. Spiritual self-contentment, above everything, hides the eternal world from us. We think we are as good as our neighbours, good enough to be untroubled by our consciences: what more can be expected? So long as that self-contentment lasts we really feel no special need of God. We believe that we believe in Him, and would resent it if any

one suggested that He is only a name to us. Nothing is a surer barrier between the soul and God than this satisfaction with one's moral and spiritual state. What a tribulation it is to be forced, suddenly or gradually, to face our awakened conscience; to see the failures and sins of years looking at us with reproachful eye; to see ourselves as we are before the eye of Him Who sets our inmost soul in the light of His countenance! That is tribulation indeed. We feel ourselves caught in God's inescapable laws. And then, in the midst of this bitter realisation of the evil through and through us, of our distance from God, there come these words, 'And have washed them white in the blood of the Lamb,' which is the symbol of God's mercy. Why do we shrink from God in fear? Is He hard? Is He cruel? Is He implacable? Is His face turned away for ever, or lifted over us only in a frown? Nay, turn and look at that Face that droops on Calvary. That is the image of God: the pain which you see there aches in God's heart: the mercy which you see there flows inexhaustible in His bosom. What, then, is it to wash our robes and make them white? Is it not to wash them in that mercy and pardon and love of God, to feel sure of His infinite patience with us in our sins and waywardness, and to bring all our life, even whatever is most stained with evil, that His pity and love and mercy may wash all white again? Nothing has a stronger purifying power than this thought of God's infinite goodness; it makes every sin a baseness and an ingratitude against Love itself.

But the blood of Christ means more than this. To wash our robes in His blood is to cleanse our whole life through His spirit of love, of self-sacrifice, of pouring out our life for others, as He poured out His. Who are they who stand in white before the Lamb? Not those whose hearts never bled with pity, whose hands were never quick to good. Not those who degrade the very sacrifice of Christ into a means of saving their own little souls, careless of the souls of others; who, in the pursuit of their business or pleasure, grind down the helpless in their power, giving them, perhaps, their legal due, but caring nothing if that due be so small that body and soul are endangered. No, not these. But those who understand through their own sorrows the sorrows of others; those who are moved by a Divine pity to help all who need their help; those who spend their lives ungrudgingly for their fellows. It matters nothing in what sphere or on what scale this is done: it may be some poor working man, or some toil-worn mother unknown in the round of common household duties. These, indeed, may be chosen as worthy of the harder part. The spirit is everything—it is to pour out one's life and character in the spirit in which Christ poured out His blood: that is to 'wash our robes and make them white' through His sacrifice.

And this, my friends, is the test of all tests, thus to wash our robes in love and self-forgetfulness. It is not easy to think of others always, feel for them, suffer for them, spend our lives for them. But it purifies. Get beyond yourself, put yourself habitu-

ally in the place of others by sympathy and pity, give your life daily for them, and evil must die out of you. Every impurity is sooner or later burnt out by the fire of Christ's love.

This, then, is the use of tribulation—to make us Christ-like, for He too was made perfect through suffering. God is not indifferent to our physical life; its wants and joys are much to Him. Yet often by disease, adversity, death, He breaks it up that the spirit may live before Him.

For it is not in this world that we see the full meaning of tribulation. Part of it, indeed, we can see even here. We all feel instinctively the difference between a man who has suffered and one who has not. The man who has borne, and is bearing, tribulations bravely has a certain fascination and power about him. He carries even in his face and bearing something of the exaltation of his sorrow, as of a being who moves in an ampler world. But it is only in the world beyond that the tribulations of earth reveal how fair their flower and sweet their fruit may be. For here we cannot rid ourselves of the thought of the pain and anguish of it all and the apparently meagre results in the formation of character. This vision of the other world which St. John saw makes it reasonable. Any tribulation is worth while that makes us worthy to stand there in white and to serve God in that land of light and love.

And how glad this should make our thought of those who are gone from us! We think of them with pity. We recall sadly the long story of their

tribulations—the wasting sickness, the battle against poverty, the sorrows that bowed them, the self-denials they endured for us and others. 'Ah,' we say, 'if only they could have been spared so many sorrows: if only they could have had a little more happiness here!' And that will always be the dumb cry of our hearts, so long as we think only of their earthly life. Lift your eyes and you will see what St. John saw—the meaning of these tribulations. The friends you parted with in darkness, weakness and pain are among the multitude which no man can number. Pity yourself, but do not pity them. 'These are they which are coming out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. *Therefore* are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.'

'Now,' says Bunyan, 'just as the Gates were opened to let in the men, I looked after them; and behold the City shone like the sun, the Streets also were paved with Gold, and in them walked many men, with Crowns on their heads, Palms in their hands, and Golden Harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord. And after that they shut up the Gates: which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.'

Close of a Sermon on the same text preached at a Memorial Service held on 30th December 1917 for Members and Adherents of St. John's United Free Church who gave their lives in the Great War.

This morning, the last Sunday of the year, we are holding our Memorial Service for those of our number who have gone out of 'the great tribulation' of this dark war. To these and to all such we shall never in this world be able to repay our debt; and to those of their own homes who mourn them we can but express feebly our sympathy. And yet, surely, even they may well be consoled by the words before us this morning. Is it too much to say that these young men, quietly laying aside the natural hopes of youth, and giving their lives for a cause that was dear to Christ, did in some quite real sense 'wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb' through the fellowship of His sufferings? Who can tell how such a sacrifice can in a moment raise the soul to undreamed-of heights of spirit and life in the eternal world?—so that they, even they, stand before the throne and share in the knowledge and power of the Eternal King; that they, even they, 'serve him day and night in his temple' of the universe, doing all the work He appoints with the unwearied joy of worship and praise; that they, even they, are led by Him Who shed His blood into new fields of sacrifice and service, for which this sacrifice and service made them fit, but now without the great tribulation, without the old weariness of

hunger and thirst, heat of sun or cold of winter, because a new, strange, heavenly joy of soul lifts them for ever above these sorrows. Again and again we hear of the new and nobler spirit which makes itself felt in what one writer calls 'the soul of an army.' Our men are not angels, he says, but 'they are raised by the cause and their necessities above the common stature of humanity. There is a simplicity and directness about them that recalls the old hero tales. . . . The war with all its curses will end, but the brave, clean spirit of these best of our fellows, and of the brotherhood they made in the valley of the shadow, will be a light to their children and their children's children.' And this brave, clean spirit will not be quenched by death: it passes on to new work, new sacrifices, and new joys in a world ruled by Him Who died for us all. As one thinks of it in its heavenly issues, one is almost tempted to envy those blessed souls that have passed through the great tribulation safely and well. Take, for instance, these lines from a poem by a soldier killed in action last October. It is called 'To "My People," before the "Great Offensive"':

'Mourn not for me too sadly; I have been,
For months of an exalted life, a king;
Peer for these months of those whose graves grow green
Where'er the borders of our Empire fling
Their mighty arms. And if the crown is death,
Death while I 'm fighting for my home and King,
Thank God the son who drew from you his breath
To death could bring

A not unworthy sacrifice,
Because of these brief months when life meant more
Than selfish pleasures. Grudge not then the price,
But say, " Our country in the storm of war
Has found him fit to fight and die for her,"
And lift your heads in pride for evermore.'

And then a sudden shot, and death widens into boundless life—the eternal field; the robes made white through sacrifice, through the love that kept nothing back; the standing before the throne of God, high and lifted up, and sharing in its power; the joy of unwearied service in the temple of the universe night and day; the Lamb Himself; the fountains of living waters; the blessedness which lifts above all pain. Are the very angels not on some lower plane than this? 'It is one of the revelations of Scripture,' says a preacher, 'that we are to judge angels; sitting above them on the shining heights. It may well be so. The angels are the Imperial Guard, doing easy duty at home. We are the Tenth Legion, marching in from the swamps and forests of the far-off frontier; scarred and battered, but victorious over sin and death.'

The God of different Personalities

'I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'—Exod. iii. 6.

These three men, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are closely related in blood; yet they are almost as distinct in character as if they were complete strangers. Abraham is a spiritual adventurer, a pioneer of faith, casting off the religion of his fathers and going forth to 'sound his dim and perilous way' to some better country of the soul. Jacob is the strangest mixture of good and evil, of dishonest craftiness and devout piety. His double name, Jacob-Israel, reveals his double nature. And between these two extremes stands Isaac, a gentle, meditative, almost neutral-coloured form, who seems to live in twilight, eclipsed by his father and his son.

Now, these three men stand as types of character in all ages of Israel. Abraham is the type of all men of faith—those who adventure their souls after God. Isaac is the type of men who adventure nothing—whose religion is quiet, meditative, almost timorous. Jacob is the type of men of double nature: crafty and pious, worldly and devout. And our text tells us that God is the God of all these types of human nature. He has no favourites: He

is as much the God of the uninteresting Isaac as of the double-dealing Jacob ; as much the God of the double-dealing Jacob as of the far nobler, more heroic Abraham.

This subject ought to be of interest to all of us, because all of us are included in one or other of these three types. Abraham, the 'Father of the faithful,' is the representative of all who in every age have had a faith in God strong enough to drive them forth from the religion of their fathers, in search of a purer religion. He could not rest satisfied with the worship of the host of heaven which had contented his fathers in Ur of the Chaldees. A Divine Voice said to him, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee' : and 'he went forth not knowing whither he went.' Doubtless before this he had many searchings of heart, perplexities of mind, though nothing is said of them except in Jewish legends. But what we *are* told is that God became the God of this high adventurer. He responded to his faith, led him from lower forms of faith to higher, ever making it more spiritual.

Now, God is the God of all such men. All through the ages there have been men so haunted by some nobler conception of God that they could not but leave their father's house and venture forth in search of a better country. Much of the present rebellion against the faith of our fathers is quite unworthy of respect. Nevertheless, this rebellion against tradition sometimes springs from a Divine inspiration. And if that is true of any of you, then

Abraham's God is your God. He rejoices in this adventurous faith. He responds to that trust which ventures out life itself upon Him. There is absolutely no possibility that His guidance will fail at last. Often, like Abraham, you will be in doubt—often the Divine promise of hope in your heart will be disappointed ; but sooner or later the God of Abraham will lead you, as He led him, to ends and issues diviner far than anything of which you now dream.

And now turn to Isaac. If God delighted in the high heroic spirit which drove Abraham on through dangers of body and soul, what pleasure could He have in a man like Isaac, apparently with none of the spirit of religious venturesomeness—quiet, gentle, meditative—somewhat humdrum and commonplace. Isaac never competes with Abraham or Jacob for our interest—he has neither the picturesque goodness of the one nor the picturesque badness of the other. But God is not the God of the picturesque only. He is the God of Isaac—of quiet, uninteresting, and even commonplace men and women.

And in truth this is well for most of us. For most of us, undoubtedly, are not conspicuous for either goodness or badness. We have no spirit of adventure : either in religion, as Abraham had, or in worldliness, as Jacob had. We live quiet, uneventful lives : if little evil can be said of us, little good can also be said. Yet, however uninteresting we may seem, God has an interest in us. He is the God of ordinary and commonplace men and

women who have no history. He has His own dealings with Isaac—His own course and methods of special education for him as surely as for his father and his son. There is not one of us overlooked by God—not one wholly commonplace in the eyes of the Eternal. Lincoln once dreamt that he overheard some one say of him, 'What a plain man!' and that he turned round and answered, 'Yes: God likes plain people. That's why He made so many of them.'

And now we turn to Jacob, and find ourselves face to face with another personality. He is two men: worldly and unworldly—dishonest and pious—crafty and devout. In short, he is the type of multitudes in all ages.

Is God the God of such men? Many are indignant at the favour shown to Jacob in Scripture, almost shocked that God should have anything to do with a man so treacherous. They dismiss as hypocrites our modern Jacobs—members of the Church who are also men of the world, devout toward God yet crafty toward men. Fortunately, God does not dismiss them. He has no love of worldliness, or craftiness, or treachery, any more than we have; nevertheless, just because Jacob needs Him so badly, He becomes Jacob's God. If He were the God only of high-souled dreamers like Abraham, or of quiet, respectable men like Isaac, it would be sad indeed for the great class of men of whom Jacob is the type. It is not a lovable type of character, yet God takes it in hand. He passes such men through many a painful struggle with

their own sins, if by any means out of the wily Jacob He may create the diviner Israel. There are few Scriptural phrases for which most of us have greater reason to be profoundly thankful than this—'the God of Jacob': the God Who does not turn away in contempt even from men of double nature; but Who will do His best for them, bearing long with the duplicity which He hates, that He may in the end cast it out.

This, then, is one great lesson of our text—that His sympathy and interest are not narrowed down to any one type of character or temperament. And, further, God is a different God to these three types. Of course, He never changes in Himself: yet He seems to change with our changes. A man of one temperament thinks of God in one way: a man of another temperament, in another. Similarly, experience of life gives its own bias to our thought of God. Hence no two men worship precisely the same God. Rather, through their nature, character, and experience, they create God in their own image. Hence, though He is one and unchangeable, He was different to the three patriarchs.

To begin with, take Isaac's conception of God. When Jacob was pursued by Laban he objected that Laban would have sent him away empty-handed, 'except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac had been with me'; and, again, to ratify the agreement come to between them, he 'sware by the fear of his father Isaac' (Gen. xxxi. 42, 53). To Isaac, then, God

was a Fear—so much so, that He was called 'the fear of Isaac.' We would naturally expect a quiet and gentle nature like Isaac to conceive of God as similarly gentle. Yet the fear of Isaac is natural enough. Gentle natures are often timid. The 'command' to sacrifice Isaac was doubtless the outcome of Abraham's own fear lest he should be unable to do for the true God what heathen fathers could do for false gods. He may have been allowed to try the experiment, so that a Divine conviction that human sacrifice was wrong might come to the Founder of the Chosen Race, and so forbid it at the outset. Yet the mysterious, inscrutable God Who had once seemed to command his father to offer him in sacrifice may well have haunted the imagination of Isaac as a form of dread.

Contrast this fear with Abraham's conception: 'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.' This idea of God sprang out of his character and circumstances. A wanderer in a land of which he possessed not so much as a foot, called to defend his kindred from the lawless kings of the country, he grew to feel his great need of a shield in the midst of constant danger: and God said, 'Fear not: I am thy shield.' Further, God had promised him a land and a great posterity: yet neither land was given nor son born to him. And in reply to his natural disappointment God says: 'I am thy exceeding great reward.' How different is all this from Isaac's Fear—God no terror threatening his life, but a protecting shield: his

exceeding great reward, more to be desired than any of His promises !

The thought of God changes once more with Jacob. True, his conception seems to change from form to form ; but perhaps his most characteristic name for God is ' the Rock of Israel.' It is a name which fits in with Jacob's own temperament. In spite of his duplicity there was in this man a certain tenacity of purpose which could not be turned aside —a rock-like firmness which could not be shaken, which made him perhaps more fitted to serve God's purpose than the easy-going Esau. And he came to recognise the same firmness in God. Against that Rock he dashed his life in vain wrestling to have his own way, and only gave in when the sinew of his thigh shrank. And then the Rock against which he broke himself became the firm foundation of his life.

These three conceptions of God represent in general the three typical attitudes of men towards the Deity. The highest is when He is a Shield thrown round us, an exceeding great reward. The lowest is the Fear of Isaac : when He surrounds us as a vague terror. Between these stands the Rock of Israel—that Being against whose rock-like laws we first dash ourselves in disobedience, and then, if we are wise, on whose rock-like faithfulness we build our life. But the thing to note is this—that our conception of God springs directly out of our own character, temperament, and general religious experience. ' I am the God of Abraham . . . of Isaac . . . and of Jacob '—precisely the same God :

yet to Abraham a Shield ; to Isaac the Fear ; to Jacob the Rock. We may use the same name for God ; but the ideas and feelings we put into the name depend almost entirely on what we ourselves are.

And, further, God had three different modes of educating these men, according to their nature and their need. Abraham's faith was purified by many disappointments. He was promised a land, yet he received not so much as to set his foot on—that he might learn to desire a better country, even an heavenly. Year after year the promise of a son remained unfulfilled, and even when he is born he is tried by a command to sacrifice him—perhaps that he might look for a nobler posterity, and see Christ's day afar off. It is ever thus that God trains all great and noble souls, like Abraham—with disappointment after disappointment. The nobler our ideals are, the less rest do they give us. No earthly country can satisfy the man who desires an heavenly ; no mere gift can content one to whom God has said, 'I am thy exceeding great reward.'

But this school of disappointment would have been disastrous to Isaac, incapable of the divine unrest of Abraham. A gentle, quiet man, content to meditate in the fields at eventide, satisfied with the savoury meat which his soul loved, he could not have understood his father's longing for God. Hence God gave him what training he was capable of receiving through his family life : not all of it happy, as we see from the rivalries of his sons. Still, it is there, in the quiet round of home-life, that, as

a general rule, quiet natures receive a great part of their spiritual education.

All this is changed when we turn to Jacob. Undoubtedly he had disappointments, like Abraham, and family training, like Isaac ; but his chief school was that of his own sins. His own treachery drove him from home for twenty years. His own treachery met him in his brother's anger, on his return. He wrestles with his own craftiness, his own worldliness, in the darkness of the night by the brook Jabbok. It is his own strength, his trust in his own cunning, which gives way when the sinew of his thigh shrank. God gave Jacob that great education which changed him into Israel in the school of his own sins. It is a painful school ; yet the only one for men of Jacob's character. The spiritual disappointments of Abraham would be of no use ; nor would the quiet, meditative twilight of Isaac's life. The only thing that would rouse a man like Jacob was just to feel his own sins closing in round his life, his duplicity entangling him like a net, and to be made to understand that there was no way of cutting through the entanglement save that of straightforwardness and honesty—becoming a new man, worthy of his new name of Israel.

And the idea underlying all this is the individuality of God's dealings with every human soul. He does not deal with us in crowds and batches. He is the God of high seekers after truth like Abraham ; He is no less the God of commonplace men like Isaac, and intriguers like Jacob. And to each type of nature and character He gives that personal,

individual training which it needs. And out of that training He gives to each a separate, individual revelation of Himself. And, however hard it is to believe this, yet be sure it is true of all men. Never read the words, 'I am the God of Abraham . . . of Isaac . . . and of Jacob' without remembering, first, that God treated these three according to their separate individualities, their distinct nature and needs; and second, that so in all ages He treats all human souls, and our souls with the rest.

The House of the Potter, or God's Second Thoughts

'Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there will I cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.'—JEREMIAH xviii. 2-4.

'THE potter's house' is generally identified with 'the potter's field' which, St. Matthew tells us, was bought with the money paid the traitor, as a burying-ground for strangers. It was situated in the valley of Hinnom to the south of Jerusalem, and it is said that the clay there is to this day suitable to the potter's trade. Jeremiah is sent thither to see a parable in action showing God's way of dealing with Israel. The nation was refusing to be moulded according to the design in the Potter's mind. To the stern prophet there was but one thing left for God to do—fling the marred vessel back into the mass of clay from which it had been taken, a shapeless, useless thing, without beauty or purpose. Jeremiah saw no alternative; but God saw one. If the human artificer is at liberty to take the marred vessel of dead clay and shape it on a new pattern and design, cannot the Eternal Worker take the

living, breathing clay of the nation of Israel, all marred and shapeless as its sins had made it, 'and make it again another vessel, as seemed good to him'? And so the prophet is taught that Israel is to have another chance. The resources of God's power and mercy are not yet at an end.

And the whole history of the world is simply the Potter making another vessel of the clay that was marred in His hand at the very beginning. No one can even imagine what must have been the beauty of His first design when the world of nature issued from His hand and even He pronounced it very good. We cannot realise the beautiful, glad life man might have lived, passing from one lovely change to another still lovelier, until, having received all that this stage could give him, he rose into a higher and more spiritual, not by the sad process of decay, but by some natural and joyful process of ascension and glory. But the living clay refused to lend itself to the carrying out of the Divine pattern of the world. God might have shattered it at a blow of the hand that had shaped it, and made a new world from the beginning out of other material. But if we sometimes feel a certain pity for a spoiled thing, even if inanimate—a desire to pick it up and mend it again—how much more God for the living creatures He had made! And so He would pursue His first purpose by means of another design. The whole history of mankind is just what the prophet saw—the Potter, out of the marred vessel of this world, making another as it seemed good to Him; and when it is marred, as

it is again and again, changing the design time after time, throwing nations, churches, individuals into new situations and fortunes, fashioning them into other vessels—not arbitrarily, as an inexorable fate, but according to His infinite wisdom and love.

We see it in the life of nations. Time after time Israel refused to be moulded after the pattern in the mind of God ; and time after time God made of it another vessel, by famine, war, pestilence, or exile, which, like the whirling of the potter's wheel, moulded, or sought to mould, the rebellious nation into some new shape that would still carry out God's original purpose in its election. It may be that a time will come when this merciful re-fashioning must cease. In the next chapter the prophet is commanded to warn Israel of this. He is to take 'a potter's earthen bottle,' and to go to the ancients of the people and of the priests in this same valley of Hinnom, and to break the bottle in their sight, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts ; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again.' Some regard the destruction of Jerusalem as this final breaking of Israel, but to St. Paul even their fall and casting away is only the moulding of this strange race into a new form of vessel, for the blessing and enrichment of the whole Gentile world, and their own final return and salvation. 'For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?' Perhaps in the restoration of Palestine to the Jews we see this receiving of Israel

once more. Many nations have thus been marred in His hand—Greece, Rome, Spain, France; but even when nations seem dashed in pieces like the potter's earthen bottle, it is more than possible that God is moulding them into other vessels for the fulfilment of His mysterious purpose of salvation. Let us hope that it is so with all nations, friend and foe, that were shattered in the Great War. The history of peoples is made up of this constant moulding and re-moulding of human clay in the hands of the Potter Who bends above the whirling wheel of earth and time.

We see this as plainly in the history of the Church. We see it in the age of Constantine, when, persecution past, the Church made alliance with the world, was infected with its evil, and became in turn the persecutor; and the Potter gave the marred vessel a new shape by setting the wild, whirling wheel of the barbarian invasions to play upon it. Or again, what does the very word Reformation mean but God taking the vessel of His own Church and making it another vessel—the same clay, but a new form? And if we are wise we shall see this in many of those changes in the Christian Church which we lament. Some, no doubt, are changes of ruin. Yet often what seems to our alarmed eyes the marring of the vessel is only God Himself holding His sinful Church upon the wheel of the revolutions of the times and seasons, to give it a new shape and a new chance.

And the hand of the Potter is as busily at work in the lives of individuals. Take some of the great names, because their greatness makes it more easily

seen. Jacob's duplicity marred the vessel which God meant to make, and on the banks of the Jabbok in the darkness of the night the hands of the Potter moulded him into a new vessel, broke his old reliance on his own cunning, and named him Israel. How terribly David's great sin marred the vessel which was a man after God's own heart! But the hands of the Potter took the poor marred thing and held it sternly to the wheel of pain, remorse, the treachery of his friends, and the rebellion of his son; fashioning another vessel out of which have flowed to penitents of every succeeding age psalms and prayers of sorrow for sin. Peter, marred with the denial of his Lord; Paul, marred with his Pharisaic self-righteousness; Augustine, marred with the sins of his youth—all these and a multitude that no man can number are witnesses to the truth of the prophet's interpretation of the Potter and his wheel. Nay, why go to these great names? God is no respecter of persons: He takes the humblest vessel of clay into those mighty and loving hands, and seeks to make of it another vessel. We mar our life in a thousand ways—by respectable worldliness no less than by wild prodigalism. In the very hand of the Potter we mar it—reared in Christian homes, taught in the Christian Church, we yet refuse to respond to His hand. And surely many of us remember critical times in our lives, when some sickness fell upon us, some ruin of circumstances, some strange unrest of soul, some fear of conscience, some hunger of the heart, something which seemed to break in

life as if a new era had begun. And what should this be but 'the hands that reach through darkness moulding men'—the Potter refusing to fling aside the poor, marred clay as lost to life and use: for a little moment, indeed, crushing the spoilt vessel into shapelessness and apparent ruin, but only in order to set it once more against the whirling wheel of life, if by any means it might yield itself to the impress of another design? That is what God is ever doing in the lives of men and women; and blessed indeed are we if we recognise the hand and let it set us to the wheel. If ever this crushing of one form and era of life and fortune come to you, lie still in the Eternal Hand, and let the Potter's wheel mould you to His will and use: it is the new chance He is giving you of a new life, a new heart, a new spirit.

We often think that this figure of the potter and the clay implies fatalism, a decree against which there is no appeal. It is strange that St. Paul's great vindication, in the ninth chapter of Romans, of God's right to show salvation to the Gentiles should have been so grievously misinterpreted as it has been. 'Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated,' is an extreme way of saying that God 'loved' a man of indomitable nature, because such a man could best fulfil His purpose in the world, while He 'hated' Esau, whose easily swayed nature made him useless as the father of a nation that would have to fight hard for its existence. 'Election' here has nothing to do with eternal salvation, but with adaptability to a certain purpose. So also

Pharaoh hardened his own heart time after time, until at last the working of God's moral law, which says that the habit of doing evil gives the soul a bias towards evil, hardened him. We may serve God willingly, as 'vessels of honour,' or unwillingly, as 'vessels of dishonour,' for He can make even the wicked man serve Him, albeit against his will. For though we are clay, we are clay that has the awful power so to will that we can mar ourselves in the hand of the Potter; and when we do so, far from compelling us as by a fate, He will even change His first design, and strive to mould us into another form. He will not make us 'vessels of dishonour' to give Him unwilling service, if He can shape us into 'vessels of honour.' We have to do with no dark, inscrutable Fate, but with a wise, loving, and righteous Being, Who stoops even to the point of accommodating Himself as far as lies within His power to our very sins, to our marring of the vessel, changing His design and making of us another vessel. St. Paul says, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' And we may say with equal right, 'O the depth and the riches both of the mercy and grace of God!' For so marvellous is the love of God that often the new vessel which He has fashioned from the old one we have marred takes on a strange, undreamt-of beauty from the very change of design. We cannot help wondering if St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Augustine could ever have had the same beauty of soul, humility, intensity of service, gratitude of

love that gave all away, had they never marred the vessel at the first. The one thing necessary is that we yield ourselves, however marred, to the hand and to the wheel with a humble and glad surrender, for it is impossible to tell how beautiful God's new design for any of us may be, or what a vessel of honour He may make us—perhaps, as Browning says, a cup to slake His own thirst, the thirst which the Father of our spirits has for His children's love.

Mars Hill—or Corinth?

'Jesus Christ, and him crucified.'—1 Cor. ii. 2.

It is impossible to understand the state of mind in which Paul entered Corinth except by setting it in the light of his experience in Athens. It is customary to set forth the high qualities of his sermon on Mars Hill—its eloquence, its wisdom, its tact, its perfect adaptation to his cultured hearers. St. Paul meets the Athenians on their own ground — touches eloquently on their current philosophies—quotes their own poets; but he most certainly does not preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Cross is very gently hinted at; and Jesus is set forth in His exaltation as the risen Judge of the world.

Now, this way of presenting the Gospel had been so unsuccessful in Athens that St. Paul determined he would make no similar mistake in Corinth. He would not keep 'the offence of the Cross' in the background. He would not surround his message with the beauties of oratory or rhetoric, with 'excellency of speech' or 'persuasive words'—he would present it in language so simple that it might seem even rude and barbarous. Nor would he try to put it in the form of a philosophy, a wisdom of man. He would confine himself, at least at the beginning, to a plain statement of the facts about

Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He determined to know nothing but this among the Corinthians. Among the Athenians he had known a great deal too much—had known so much of their wisdom that he had failed to proclaim God's wisdom ; and now in Corinth he deliberately shunned whatever might interfere with his message, 'lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect.'

What, then, is the Gospel? And what is the place in preaching of such things as philosophy, rhetoric, or oratory? To St. Paul the Gospel is undoubtedly 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified.' All through the opening chapters of this Epistle he contends uncompromisingly against the Greek idea that it is a philosophy which can be thought out and elaborated by the human mind. It is first and foremost a particular Person Who lived a certain life and died a certain death ; and St. Paul regarded it as his first duty to proclaim that Person—to tell plainly the facts of His life and death, trusting to those facts to make their own great spiritual impression on his hearers. It is often said that St. Paul's Epistles, which were, after all, addressed to those who already knew the life of Christ, contain very few references to the life of Jesus ; but that is no proof that his preaching did not contain them. According to his express statement here, the very first thing he did was to tell his hearers who Jesus was—what life He lived, what death He died.

It is sometimes said we must get behind St. Paul to Christ—behind many of St. Paul's interpreters, if you like, but certainly not behind St. Paul himself.

He had no idea of substituting some Pauline theology or philosophy for Christ. The first thing he did was to set before men this Jesus Christ as the very substance of His Gospel. I have no doubt he gave them an outline of His life, death, and resurrection; of the works He performed, the teaching he gave, the claims He put forward. This was the absolutely necessary foundation of any after teaching.

Now, let us think seriously of the change from St. Paul's day to our own. Is not the Gospel to multitudes, particularly of educated people, a mere philosophy? Many are deeply interested intellectually in Christianity as a system of ethics and philosophy: interested to compare it with other religions, to defend it from the philosophies of the day, to reconcile it with social and scientific theories. And to satisfy this kind of interest many of our sermons and lectures are of this philosophical kind—defending, reconciling, in relation to the speculations round us.

Now, I do not say this is never to be done; but it should be done far seldomer than it is. Our religion is historical—based upon certain facts of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and our prime business is with those facts, not with any philosophical system inferred from them. For remember, philosophical systems change from generation to generation, but the facts of history remain. Hence any preacher who keeps in the background Jesus Christ and Him crucified—the great facts of His life and death—is betraying the Gospel.

Has the Christian religion, then, no philosophy

of its own? Are we never to apply our minds to it, as if we were afraid of its being unreasonable at the core? By no means. In the sixth verse St. Paul says: 'Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect.' We have only to read his Epistles to see how often he treats of subjects which lie beyond the strict limits of the facts of Christ's life and death —His pre-existence, the meaning of His death, the resurrection of just and unjust, His coming in judgment, His gathering of all things together in Him, His relation to the whole history of the world, Jew and Gentile.

There is, then, a Christian philosophy which forms the Christian explanation of the world. But it is for the perfect, those who have grown to Christian manhood. Some are but children in Christ—making their first acquaintance with Christ as their Saviour from sin through the story of His life and death. When they really know Jesus Christ and Him crucified, when they have tried to follow Him in their lives, when their own experience has taught them that He is in very truth the power of God unto salvation—then out of that experience the higher wisdom of which St. Paul speaks will grow, or at least it will prove a fit soil in which it may be planted. This was Christ's own method: 'If any man is willing to do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine.'

Many of us try to reverse this natural order. Many who have never personally accepted Jesus Christ, never gained by submission to Him any Christian experience, yet plunge into the mysteries

of the Trinity, the Atonement, the Divinity of Christ, or else they reject them without consideration. Think of the imperious way in which they demand a philosophy of such things which will satisfy their intellects—on pain of rejecting the Christ Himself. Surely we may say : ' You are reversing the natural order of education. Before you can have a philosophy of Christianity, you must be a Christian. Before you can judge the high wisdom of Paul's Epistles, you must make acquaintance with Him of Whom the Gospels speak. If you first really submit to Him as Saviour and Lord, many of the high mysterious doctrines of His religion will begin to grow reasonable, and worthy of your faith.' There is nothing that needs to be said more than this : that the natural order of education must be observed, and history precede philosophy ; that the acceptance of Christ crucified must come before that wisdom which Paul spoke among the perfect.

Next, what is the place of rhetoric or oratory in Christian preaching? We all know the popular preacher who can by flashes of eloquence carry away his audience as on the wings of the wind. We have all admired fine literary style in a sermon. In these days of education, excellency of words counts for much—the balance and harmony of sentences, the subtlety of style. And, in truth, the highest system of religion is worthy of being presented in beautiful language. The jewel should be set in gold, not brass or iron.

And yet the value of beautiful style and diction may be counterbalanced by their dangers. St. Paul,

himself a man of culture and education, discounts Greek eloquence. He came not with 'excellency of speech,' not with 'persuasive words of wisdom' or philosophy. So much did he in Corinth despise mere eloquence, that his enemies said he 'was rude in speech.' To quote Frederick Myers' 'St. Paul':

> 'Christ! I am Christ's, and let the name suffice you;
> Yea, for me too He greatly hath sufficed:
> Lo, with no winning words I would entice you.
> Paul hath no honour and no friend but Christ.'

Now, was this neglect of the graces of oratory wise or foolish? St. Paul himself points out two dangers of reducing the Gospel to an eloquent philosophy. The first is in chapter i. verse 17: 'Not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void'—literally emptied or made void of its substance. Thus when a preacher is over-anxious about the form of his message, its meaning is very apt to suffer. The Cross of Christ becomes secondary to the style. So, also, if the hearer listens with an ear to which eloquence is the chief consideration, the substance of the preacher's message is half forgotten.

Again, in chapter ii. verses 4 and 5, St. Paul says: 'And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' St. Paul means that he deliberately refused to turn the Gospel into a philosophy and to commend

it by eloquent and persuasive words, lest his hearers' faith should have no firmer foundation on which to stand. For, in truth, an eloquent philosophy is a very poor foundation for any man's faith. What we receive through argument we may abandon through argument. What we have been brought to believe by 'persuasive words,' we may be brought to disbelieve by more persuasive words. We all know people whose belief is swayed by the last orator they have heard—whose faith stands only in the wisdom of men, and this because they have never come into any real contact with 'the power of God,' have never experienced what St. Paul here calls the 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power.'

Some commentators think that in this 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power' St. Paul refers to the signs and miracles which in the Apostolic Church accompanied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as if he said: 'I rely not upon eloquence or philosophy but upon miracles to prove the truth of Christ crucified.' I am quite unable to believe that any such idea ever crossed his mind. He had just rebuked the Jewish craving for signs; and he goes on to say, 'God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.' In other words, the demonstration is the conviction which the Spirit of God flashes upon the spirit of the man who believes. For we must remember that there is a spirit in man—a something which lies far deeper than the intellect. Let any Christian among you ask himself what it is in him that is most firmly convinced of the reality and power of Christ crucified, and he will almost

certainly find that it is not primarily his intellect, as it would be if the Gospel were only a philosophy. Since it is a Person, then in some region deeper than the mind Person has met with Person, Spirit has met with Spirit. Even when your intellect can give no clear account of your religion, your spiritual nature has gone through, and is going through, an experience which is a convincing proof to itself, and which no opposing philosophy can shake. What better words can you get to describe this than the 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power'?—Spirit, because it is a spiritual experience; power, because it has been powerful to break the ancient tyranny of sin.

And therefore, my friends, the Gospel is not primarily an eloquence to please us with style of composition or delivery. Nor is it primarily a philosophy to satisfy our intellects. It is primarily Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and a certain spiritual attitude towards Him. It is primarily the great facts of His life, death, and resurrection, and the bearing of those facts on us as individual souls. Anything that stands in the way of Jesus Christ and those great facts about Him having their due effect on our lives, is a positive evil. It may be our love of eloquent and beautiful style. It may be our love of philosophising—our desire to see the whole subject clearly with our minds. Let us love eloquence and wisdom, but let us beware lest they make the Cross of Christ of none effect for us.

'Strong Son of God'

'Christ the power of God.'—1 Cor. i. 24.

In these words St. Paul is arguing against his own countrymen. He has said, two verses before, that 'the Jews require a sign'—some great manifestation of the power of God, in proof that Christ was Divine. They had confronted Christ at every turn with this demand for a sign, not on the earth, but some wonder in the heavens, so manifestly from God that doubt would be impossible. The only 'power of God' they would recognise was one which appealed to their imaginations through their senses.

Now, in reply to this demand, St. Paul brings forward Christ—not in any of those aspects of His being which we consider signs of power, such as His Divine nature, His miracles, His wisdom, His victory over death, His exaltation to the right hand of God. St. Paul passes by all these, and fixes his eyes on what, according to every human view, is only a sign of weakness—namely, the Crucifixion: 'We preach Christ crucified.' St. Paul knew that such a Christ could be nothing but a stumbling-block to his countrymen. The Messiah they expected was one whose claims were to appeal to the whole world by irresistible power—signs in the heavens above, wonders on the earth beneath,

victorious trampling under His feet of every foe. Where was all this in a dead man nailed to a Cross? If He had been the true Christ and not an impostor He would have had power to save Himself. And yet St. Paul meets this contempt with the bold paradox that this very weakness of Christ crucified is the power of God—for 'the weakness of God is stronger than men.'

In this whole passage we find two opposing ideas of power. The Jewish—which is just the ordinary human idea—is that power is some manifestation of force, appealing more or less to the senses. But Christianity has brought a new conception. Power, as revealed in the Cross of Christ, does not strike and dazzle the senses. Its appeal is to something which lies far deeper—to the heart, the soul, the moral and spiritual faculties.

Consider the ordinary ideals of power which rule the lives of men. In the lowest stages of human life, the man who comes to the front is the one who surpasses his comrades in physical strength and endurance. Even in our own civilised country there are some whose only idea of power is bodily strength.

An athlete often thinks of power as strength, endurance, and agility. In the early years of life this same idea rules. The big, strong, domineering boy who can bully his weaker companions finds in his superior physical strength his ideal of power. And in these days of athletic exercises there are many young men who think much of bodily strength. And in this they are quite right. Health of body

often brings health of mind, and the athletic life is valuable as a stage of education. Nevertheless, this conception of power belongs to the stage when the body is more powerful than the spirit.

This lowest conception quickly passed into another —the idea of social power. The family grew into the clan, the clan into the nation. And out of this sprang a wider conception of power—still as physical as ever, but no longer that of an individual standing by himself. It is the power of masses of men, welded together for special ends. There gather round a nation all those majestic signs of power which strike the imagination through the senses: the pomp of armed men—the flash and glitter of gold and steel—the insignia of royalty and honours of many ranks—the strength of navies. Not one of us can remain unmoved by such things as these. For we are citizens of a great nation; and these signs of greatness thrill eye and ear, stir the heart, set the blood bounding—and this often because they give us a sense of power.

Wealth, again, means power of a kind. The poor man is weak in many ways, despised for his poverty, a prey to miseries and oppressions. But the rich man finds that his golden key opens almost every door. His wealth protects him from a thousand discomforts, pains, and worries. It sets the whole world a-running to fulfil his least whim. It throws around him an air of importance and distinction which, perhaps, he himself little deserves. It even modifies the ten commandments for his benefit: for who would dream of applying the Decalogue

as bluntly to the sins of a man who can drive his carriage and pair through it, as if he were a poor man who had to trudge the dirty street with boots a little out of repair? Undoubtedly wealth means power—especially social power; and it is the ideal of most of us.

But as men advance in civilisation they leave behind these forms of material power and attain to the conception of intellectual power. They see that a man may not be physically strong, may have no control of armies, may possess no wealth, and yet through his intellect may have great power over his fellows. 'Knowledge is power.' In all generations men have striven to control nature. Often they were misled by superstitions of alchemy, astrology, and wizardry, and spent their lives in searching for the philosophers' stone and the elixir of life. But at last they struck the right path. They are finding out Nature's long-kept secrets, and a world of power is opening up to them: power to bind lightning, fire, and water, and compel Nature's forces to fulfil man's will.

Similarly knowledge of human nature is power—yes, even when the knowledge is evil. There are some who know the sins and weaknesses of their fellows so thoroughly that they can play on every string, and draw out whatever evil music they wish. This is the power of cunning and of an unworthy diplomacy. In its better forms this mental power has a nobler influence. A great poet, philosopher, or historian is one of the great forces that mould the world. His words pass from age to age and silently

each generation receives their inspiration. This noble power makes no appeal to the senses. It is independent of the force of arms and the trappings of authority. It appeals only to the thoughts, feelings, imaginations of the mind and heart.

These, then, are the great conceptions of power which rule the lives and imaginations of men. And it is through the medium of these that we form our conceptions of the power of God. We shape our God out of our own hearts. When we speak of the power of God we can only mean our own idea of power widened out into infinity and transferred to some Being we call God. Now, many judge of the Divine power according to the analogy of material things. Power means to them strength of body, or of armies, or of wealth and material resources. And so they surround the very thought of God with the signs and attributes of physical strength. They think of Him as the Almighty—able to create worlds. The rush of the hurricane, the ocean driven into foam, the flash of lightning—these are the signs of His power. Then they take the outward pomp of earthly royalty and transfer them to the King of Kings. He too sits on a throne ; round Him, like courtiers, angels and archangels bend : His will is supreme ; He, too, has His armies and fights His battles ; the resources of the universe are His.

Others make a great intellectual advance and shape their idea of Divine power on the analogy of the power of the human mind. To them, God is the Infinite and Eternal Mind. In the thoughts of that Mind all things exist, and all the knowledge

and wisdom human minds ever can possess must come from it.

Now, these are aspects of the Divine power, but they are its lower aspects, and utterly misleading if regarded as a full revelation of it. For St. Paul declares that 'Christ is the power of God.' If so, there must be another quality of power—different from anything we have yet considered. Look at Christ's life and you will see at a glance that there is little there but what the world counts weakness. He had none of the power of wealth; He was a poor working man in Nazareth; afterwards He lived on charity, and sometimes had not 'where to lay His head.' He organised no army, founded no state: when His work was done there were not more than a handful of men who believed in Him—and these almost entirely poor peasants and fishermen, uneducated and uninfluential. And then His life sank in such humiliation and defeat that it seemed as if His name could never recover from the ignominy of His end: crucified as a common slave or criminal, nailed up on a beam of wood as vermin are nailed against a barn door—for this seems to have been the idea underlying the crucifixion of criminals. That is not what the world counts power, but rather, from beginning to end, weakness, shame, and defeat. Yet St. Paul calls it the power of God. If that is true, then all the ideals of power which have hitherto ruled the world must be swept into the background, for here in Christ crucified we come upon something deeper and nearer the reality of things.

Let us, then, ask whether St. Paul was right or wrong. *Is* Christ crucified the power of God, or is St. Paul's phrase merely a rhetorical paradox? There is nothing clearer in the history of this earth than that Christ is a power. He has made new men and women of millions. He has turned them right round and set their faces towards God. That is the hardest task in the universe. To create a world is nothing compared with re-creating one human soul. The victories of Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, were child's play in comparison. Their power could crush men into submission, but it could not penetrate the inner nature and change the secret heart and will and soul. This is what Christ has done again and again. Have you ever tried to reform any soul held in the grasp of some sin? Motive after motive you urge—the injury he is doing his own nature, self-respect, public opinion, social shame and ruin, the love of friends, his place in this world or the next—all in vain. For a moment the poor sinful feet make a feeble struggle to lift themselves out of the mire, and then sink back deeper. A sense of despair comes over you: you feel as if there were nothing to which to appeal. And then one day a new heart, a new will, a new spirit, seem given; the man slowly but surely climbs up to his true manhood. If you asked him the secret, he would tell you, with St. Paul, that Christ crucified is the power of God unto salvation.

Now, believe me, there is nothing worth calling power compared with the power that can accomplish that. To break a man's spirit; to reverse his will;

to turn the currents of his heart ; to make him love what formerly he hated ; to set his spirit triumphantly superior to sin or weakness : whoever can work these revolutions is strong beyond all that the mighty of the earth ever conceived of power. And Christ the crucified, Who died in shame and failure, has done it again and again, unless the experience of millions is false.

Pass beyond the individual and ask, What is Christ's influence on the world at large? His is no name of shame and weakness now ; it is above every name. The world is far from being completely leavened with His spirit ; but the leaven has begun to spread and nothing can stop it. The Cross, which was as shameful as the gallows-tree, is now a symbol of honour. Whatever is pure, true, loving, whatever is just and honourable, whatever is enlightened and progressive in the life of families and nations, we instinctively trace to the Crucified. The thoughts and feelings of whole continents have been changed by Him. Forms of vice and crime have vanished because public opinion grew to feel that they were hateful to His Spirit. Many of the great ones of the earth exercise their power in His name. In some measure He guides the legislatures of Christendom. In His name kings are crowned —armies march into battle—the little child is baptised—the old man laid in the grave. There is not a man whose opinion is worth anything who would not admit that whatever and whoever are in harmony with His Spirit are on the way to increase and power and victory ; while everything out of

harmony is doomed to decay and to vanish away. So powerful is His influence now, that even hypocrites feel they can carry on their hypocrisies best under cover of His name. That is the power gained by One Who lived His life in weakness and died as a criminal. And as we think of this power—its greatness, its increase, above all, its quality—we feel that it is indeed 'the power of God,' and that all the power of kings and emperors, armies and state, wealth and earthly knowledge, are, compared with this, the mere shows and shadows of power.

Now, what is the secret of this power? The answer is that Christ crucified is this power of God, because of the new conception of God which He has given to the world. Men are so steeped in low ideas of power that they can scarcely understand a Divine power which is not material. We are only slowly outgrowing the thought of God as a kind of Oriental despot, seeking His own pleasure, avoiding all pain, pleased with homage, crushing opposition with the irresistible force of His almightiness.

Now, Christ revealed a quite other idea of the Divine power. It is the power of emotion, sympathy, pity, suffering, self-sacrifice. His Cross is the revelation of the Almighty God, Whose power and majesty defy our imagination, stooping to our weakness to save us—bearing our sins and sorrows simply because He loves us. That is the Gospel—a new conception of God; a new conception of power. No other idea of God has such power to change our life. You picture God's greatness and majesty to a sinful soul. You tell him all flesh is

as grass to be withered by His breath—His laws are inescapable. His hand crushes all that rises against Him. This picture of power may drive him to despair, harden him into defiance—or force him to banish the very thought of such a God. But it will not make him love Him. And now show him Christ, the image of God. Here are the weaknesses of humanity—hunger and thirst, poverty and weariness, temptation and struggle, and finally tears and blood and death. And that is the image of God ! How incredible it would all sound if we heard it for the first time ! How it sweeps aside all former thoughts of God's majesty and outward pomp and material force !

This, then, is the power of God—this pity, this love, this self-sacrifice, this crucified Christ Who draws us to Himself through pity and love. The worst sinner feels it would be unchivalrous not to respond. We hate ourselves and our unworthiness. But we must not hate, for God does not hate us. He is generous ; He forgives ; He dies to save us. That is why Christ crucified is the power of God. No one can really believe these things about God without being regenerated by his faith. If God cares, suffers for us, forgives, helps at every turn—all must go well with us. Sin must be cast out at last ; we must rise into His likeness, and grow strong to bear and strong to do the will of One so utterly good. We feel that if Christ could turn pain and defeat to victory, so also can we, if we bear them in a certain spirit—even if they be the penalty for our own wrong-doing, whatever it may be. And

so we must revise our conception of power. What is it that endures, that wins its way in spite of all hindrances, the very failure of which secures its victory? Strength of body decays, wealth vanishes, armies fail, the very names of the princes of this world are forgotten; but truth, integrity, love, endure for ever. They are a permanent possession of the man in whose soul they exist—they are a legacy to the human race. That is the great lesson of Christ crucified. He goes down in weakness and shame—all seems lost: but nothing is lost. His power breaks out in souls rescued from sin and transformed into the image of God; it reappears in the long history of the world, in the gradual purification of public morals and the elevation of public ideals.

You want to possess power. Well, there are the shadow and the substance: choose between them. The shadow of power is all that Christ put aside with careless hand—wealth, fame, political influence, show and glitter, soldiers and arms, the pomp of earthly and material glory. These are the shadows of power. The substance is truth, justice, purity, mercy, love, self-sacrifice—those things which Christ by His Cross has taught us make up the Divine Being and are eternal as God Himself. And the secret of Christian living is so to learn what God's idea of power is that we seize the substance and let the shadow go.

'The Foolishness of God'

'The foolishness of God is wiser than men.'—1 Cor. i. 25.

It is impossible to give to this bold and striking saying any definite meaning, until we read it in the light of the whole passage in which it occurs. In the eighteenth verse St. Paul had said, 'The word of the Cross is to them that are perishing foolishness'; and in the twenty-third he says that to the Greeks Christ crucified was 'foolishness.' His reply is that at all events it is the foolishness of God, Whose foolishness is wiser than men—than the Greeks in particular.

For if there ever existed a people that might reasonably claim to possess wisdom, it was that marvellous little Greek nation. To this day the Greeks are our masters in philosophy—the masters of all Christendom. There is almost no subject that Plato, Aristotle, and the rest did not discuss with marvellous subtlety, adventurousness, and freedom of intellect: the world without and the world within; the nature of the Gods; the laws of morality, of the human mind; the immortality of the soul; the final judgment of men; the principles of politics; the world beyond death—all were explored with a completeness which has

made the philosophies of other nations little more than a commentary upon theirs.

And so to intellects filled with all the wisdom of which the natural mind is capable it must have seemed 'foolishness,' almost insanity, to say that a far diviner wisdom had appeared in the form of a crucified Man. Their art had brought the human form in marble to its highest possible beauty: to ask them to exchange that divine loveliness which haunted their imaginations for the broken form of a crucified Man, must have seemed the wanderings of a disordered brain.

Nevertheless, St. Paul was right—'the foolishness of God is wiser than men,' even at their wisest. Let us consider some of the directions in which Greek wisdom has failed to answer those deepest wants of human nature which have been answered by that foolishness of God, the Cross of Christ.

Do not imagine this is an old-world subject, long dead and done with, like ancient Greece itself. Ancient Greece is, indeed, dead; but its spirit lives through all generations. There are thousands of intellectual men among ourselves who bear the same attitude toward our religion as did the philosophers of Greece. They rely solely on the natural reason, the naked intellect of man himself, and regard Christ and Him crucified as foolishness. To answer one is to answer both.

Take the knowledge of God which the wisdom of ancient Greece attained—not in its debased forms, but as conceived by the most spiritual mind of

heathendom. Plato protests indignantly against the tales poets told of the gods, attributing to Divine beings the passions and low desires of fallen, sinful humanity. He declares that we must impute no evil to God, to Whom he attributes the strictest justice, so that, if not here, at least elsewhere, every man will receive the due reward of his deeds. Like Euripides, he sees

> 'the secret road
> That bringeth justice ere the end be trod
> To all that breathes and dies.'

It is much for Plato to have reached this high conception of God. Yet it omits entirely the whole range of the sympathetic virtues. There is in it no pity for human sin or sorrow—far less any passion of a self-sacrificing love. Indeed, Plato is uncertain and vacillating in his doctrine of God, at one time declaring the knowledge of Him the noblest knowledge of all; at another, that we know nothing of the gods: 'there is one excellent principle which . . . we must acknowledge—that of the gods we know nothing, either of their natures, or of the names which they give themselves.' But of this he speaks very positively: the gods 'cannot possibly be supposed to have either joy or sorrow'; 'there would be great impropriety in their having either,' for this would destroy the perfection of the Divine nature. Hence to the highest Greek wisdom the gods were beings careless of our sorrows, of our sins; incapable of being afflicted in our afflictions or sacrificing themselves to save us. Tennyson well

describes them by the mouth of the wise Roman Lucretius :

> 'The Gods, who haunt
> The lucid interspace of world and world,
> Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,
> Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
> Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
> Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
> Their sacred everlasting calm!'

And just such a Deity is that which modern wisdom often fashions for itself. Our philosophers and scientists speak of God as Nature or Force—as the Unknown and the Absolute—as the Universal Reason or Humanity : but whatever the name, they all agree that this Deity has no pity, no mercy, no love.

Now, is this the kind of God which satisfies your heart and soul? When some hour of anguish comes on you, are you content to know that the Being Who made you neither feels your anguish nor cares for it? Or when conscience arraigns you at its bar and flashes through you a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, are you content to know that in God there is neither mercy nor love, but only an iron justice which will not let you go till you have paid the uttermost farthing? No such conception of God was attained by any ancient Greek or modern philosopher as that revealed in the foolishness of the Cross—a God Who pities, sympathises, loves His sinful, suffering creatures even to the point of suffering to redeem them. The world by its wisdom knew not God, if God is such as this.

Consider next the Greek conception of sin. And once more, take it at its best, as we find it in Socrates. His favourite doctrine is that virtue is knowledge; vice, ignorance. No man sins except through lack of knowledge; enlighten the mind, and sin must disappear.

How curiously modern it sounds! We are often told that we must educate if we wish a better world. If only it were true! Doubtless knowledge and education do produce improvement. But Greece itself is proof of the impotence of knowledge alone to curb what even Socrates, with a glimpse of the truth, calls the 'wild-beast' passions of human nature. Knowledge in that land blossomed into the fairest flowers the world has ever seen of philosophy, poetry, sculpture: yet the nation sank into a state of vice which destroyed it.

Or look not at sin but at sinners. Did the wisdom of men devise any mode of saving them? Rather, the wisdom of the ancient world saw no reason why sinners should be saved at all. There is a famous controversy between Origen, a Christian Father of the third century, and Celsus, a heathen philosopher. Celsus, with very considerable power, attacks Christianity, which, to him, must be evil since it invites the worst of sinners. Other religions, he says, invite to their mysteries the good, 'making proclamation as follows: "Every one who has clean hands and a prudent tongue," or "He who is pure from all pollution, and whose soul is conscious of no evil, and who has lived justly" . . . But,' he continues, 'let us hear what kind of persons these

Christians invite. Every one, they say, who is a sinner, who is devoid of understanding, who is a child, and, to speak generally, whoever is unfortunate, him will the Kingdom of God receive. Do you not call him a sinner, then, who is unjust, and a thief, and a housebreaker, and a poisoner, and a committer of sacrilege, and a robber of the dead? What others would a man invite if he were issuing a proclamation for an assembly of robbers?'

Origen's answer was easy and triumphant. He had only to point to thousands reclaimed from such vices to purity and duty. But the fact that a philosopher could utter such a taunt proved, first, that heathen wisdom had no true understanding of sin; next, that it had no sympathy with sinners; and, third, that it had no hope of their moral recovery.

Now, in all these matters is it not the simple truth that 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men'? Sin is not to be cured by knowledge alone—it is to be cured by drawing forth our affections to 'Christ, and him crucified': 'If ye love me, ye will keep my words.' The very nature of sin has been taught to the world by the Cross of Christ, far more truly than by the moral philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and all their commentators to the present moment. And while the heathen world at its wisest despaired of any moral recovery of sinners, the Cross has proved itself, generation after generation, 'the power of God unto salvation,' a power which in the souls of a great multitude which no man can number has broken the tyranny of sin, opened the prison doors, led sinful men and women

forth into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

Once more, the philosophy of the Greeks appealed only to an elect few. Even had it been able to give true ideas of God, and to deal effectively with the problem of sin, still it could have had no power over the mass of men, who have neither the leisure nor the intellect necessary for the subtle problems of philosophy.

But 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men' just in this: that the Cross of Christ makes an appeal which is universal, dependent on no philosophical attainments or intellectual power, but touching the general heart of mankind. The poor, uneducated peasant, artisan or slave, totally unable to follow the windings of a Socratic dialogue, could love Christ with an intense and passionate devotion—could understand with his heart the appeal of the Cross, and respond to it with the love and loyalty of his life. The wisdom of men was foolish in this, that it could touch only the few: the foolishness of God was wise in this, that its appeal was to the universal heart.

And just this is St. Paul's argument: 'For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh . . . are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.' St. Paul appeals to the Corinthians themselves in proof of this. They were nearly all poor men and women, slaves and artisans to whom poverty and hard work had denied the chance of intellectual training. If, then, the Gospel were a

philosophy which they had to master with their intellects, plainly it was not for them. But it was 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified,' and therefore they, 'the foolish things of the world,' were called into His fellowship.

This idea may be familiar to us now, but it was far from familiar to the ancient world. Aristotle discusses the question whether slaves and artisans are capable of virtue. His answer is that slaves are capable of an inferior quality of virtue, which the low-born can learn only from their masters. Thus to artisans, who have a less close connection with their masters than have slaves, 'virtue is impossible, or hardly possible.' Or return to Celsus. One of his accusations is that Christianity invites the ignorant, the uneducated, the unintelligent, 'workers in wool and leather, and fullers and persons of the most uninstructed and rustic character'—very eloquent before a circle of ignorant women and children, but unable to say a word before their better-informed masters. We find the same disdain toward the unlettered day-worker among the wise men of the Jews. In the 'Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach,' it is asked: 'How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and glorieth in the goad, that driveth oxen, and is occupied in their labours, and whose talk is of bullocks? He giveth his mind to make furrows, and is diligent to give the kine fodder.' And so with carpenter, smith, potter: all are wise in their work, but 'they shall not be found where parables are spoken'; that is to say, the higher wisdom which the Jewish rabbis regarded

as religion itself was beyond their reach. And yet to just such Christ spake the parables which have helped to change the history of the world.

This is too often the view of learned men everywhere—even in the Christian Church. Whenever Christianity is turned into a theology, a philosophy, a wisdom, demanding intellect trained in a special way, Christianity sinks back into this attitude of the Greek philosophers towards the poor, uneducated mass of men.

But just this, which the wise of the world flung as a taunt against our religion, is its glory. The foolishness of God is so much wiser than men that it appeals to all men independently of any accidental thing, such as education. There is a noble passage in another of the Christian Fathers, Tertullian, in which he sweeps aside the pretensions of the culture of his day, and summons, as it were, the naked human soul: 'Stand forth, O soul . . . from whatever source . . . stand forth and give thy witness. But I call thee not, as when, fashioned in schools, trained in libraries, fed up in Attic academies and porticoes, thou pourest forth thy wisdom. I summon thee, simple and rude, uncultured and untaught, such as they have thee who have thee by thyself—that very thing in its pure integrity—from the road, the street, the workshop. I want thine *in*experience, since thy poor experience is trusted by none. I demand of thee the things thou bringest with thee into man, just what thoughts thou hast learnt either from thyself or from thy Creator.'

It is to this naked soul, the bare manhood which

exists somewhere in all men beneath the incrustations of both education and want of education, that Christ crucified makes His universal appeal. Not that Christianity has no wisdom of its own. St. Paul takes care to say it has, in the next chapter. We must never imagine that our religion is opposed to education, is irrational at the core, or is an appeal to ignorance as such. It has a wisdom, a philosophy of its own. It has given a marvellous impetus to the mind of man. Even our modern philosophers and scientists seldom realise how large a part of their wisdom comes from the very religion they sometimes seem to despise. Yet it remains true that this Christianity is not something devised by the wit of man. Call it foolishness if you please ; yet remember it is the 'foolishness of God which is wiser than men.' That crucified Christ has revealed to us a nobler conception of God than ever visited Plato's divinest dreams : He has touched the sin of the world with a healing power of which no philosopher ever conceived ; He makes His appeal of love which dies to save, to the universal heart of man, simply as man—which the wisdom of this world has never attempted to do. Verily, 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men.'

'For joy thereof he goeth'

'The kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field.'—MATT. xiii. 44.

LET us try to see the picture set before us in this parable. A man is crossing a field. He may have crossed it a hundred times before, so that every height and hollow, every bush and tree, is familiar to his eyes. It is only a path for his feet, and he takes note of the ground only just enough not to stumble on it.

But one day the familiar, commonplace field suddenly becomes an object of absorbing interest. A gleam of something shining catches his eye, he turns it over with his foot; it is gold, and there is more beneath. The field is suddenly transformed. 'For joy thereof he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.'

It is a picture of all human life. For example, there is the field of our common daily work and experience. When we begin our special work in the world, there is usually some gleam of poetry upon it. It is new; the heart is young; and fancy and hope fling their lights round the most commonplace occupations. I have heard of a little collier boy who had a feeling of romance and adventure when he rose on a cold winter morning to begin work at the pit. But sooner or later the poetry fades into the light of common day, the hopes of

what may be die out, and we are left with nothing but a weary field of work, dull and unprofitable. There it stretches, morning by morning, to be toiled through till evening. There is nothing more terrible than the way in which our work tends to grow monotonous and commonplace, till we cease to expect anything from it except weariness of body and mind.

Obviously, the one thing which would change all this would be to discover that even this commonplace field of daily experience hides in its soil a treasure over which our heedless feet pass every day. Imagine that the treasure was actual gold. Say that one of us discovered in our daily work something which could be patented and turned into a fortune. The discovery would instantaneously transform our commonplace occupation and invest its driest, unpleasantest details with an inexhaustible interest!

Imagine, then, how great the interest should be—might be—if we could make the discovery that deep in the common soil of our daily task there lay hidden treasures of spiritual wealth—the discipline and education of our souls which might make us men indeed. And to say that this is so is no platitude of the pulpit. How shall a man lay up within himself the very treasure of manhood—faithfulness, truth, justice, self-control, prudence—unless he has some special contribution to make to the sum of the world's work, and unless he make that contribution joyfully, heartily, faithfully? To many of us, alas! the field of daily work becomes a monotony

and a weariness ; yet beneath the surface of it lies hidden the very Kingdom of God, and all life would be transformed into a wonder and a joy if our eyes could see it.

Or let us think of the world as a literal field. We have perhaps little interest in fields. We have seen them often—walked on them times innumerable.

Nevertheless, think of the varied kinds of interest which even a common field possesses for different eyes. The farmer sees the hidden treasure of the harvest, and if the eyes of his soul are open he sees far more than this :

> ' At the back of the loaf is the golden flour ;
> At the back of the flour is the mill ;
> At the back of the mill is the sun and shower
> And the breeze and the Father's will.'

So, too, the miner may see the hidden treasure of coal or iron or gold. The botanist finds his treasure in the life and forms of grasses and flowers ; the artist in the beauty of colour and light and shadow—treasures often hid from others.

But now suppose that you and I are neither farmer nor miner, botanist nor artist ; is there not in each common field and wood, in sea and sky, in every change of day and night in the every-day world of Nature, a treasure which is the open secret of the universe, which we may all find every day we rise—in the soil beneath our feet, in the air we breathe, in the light by which we see ? It would transform even the material world if our eyes were opened to see not merely crops and minerals, not

merely science and beauty, however necessary and good these are, but the very God Who made them all. Never could the world and its common fields become commonplace again if our eyes were so opened that every bush burned with the fire of an Eternal Spirit in Whom all things live and move and are. It is the Kingdom of God made visible in each familiar field—a hidden treasure for which a man might well sell all he has with joy. It is a cosmic consciousness, a realisation of the greatness of the universe and its Creator by which we

> 'See the world in a grain of sand,
> And heaven in a wild flower,'

and by which we know that if we could understand what the tiniest grass or lichen means we would know 'what God and man is.'

Let us turn to the world of humanity. One of the saddest things about life is the way in which the entire world of our fellow-men tends to grow commonplace and worthless in our eyes. In early life we may have had a touch of the 'enthusiasm of humanity,' a generous faith in human nature, a generous hope in its powers and possibilities. With most of us enthusiasm, faith, hope, all fade away with the passing years. Our fellow-men grow commonplace, dull, uninteresting. We see nothing in them worthy of admiration, care, or love.

Our loss is infinite when we fall into this strange blindness. Almost anything is to be welcomed that breaks the familiar soil and shows us the gleam of

gold. Sometimes revelation comes in some great onward movement, some revolution which shows the strange powers hidden in human nature. Sometimes it is seen in some deed of heroic self-sacrifice, when common men in whom there seemed nothing remarkable lay down life for an idea, a cause, their country, or their comrades. Sometimes it comes in strange sharp forms of personal pain. We live for years side by side with some human soul in our home, wife or husband, parent or child, until it grows commonplace to us and we see in it little of special value. And then some day the soil of the field is opened—yes, opened literally—and as we lay our dead in the grave, for the first time we see the hidden treasure of their souls shining through the dust, and learn, too late, how worthy they were of the love we never gave them.

So the hidden treasure of our fellow-men may be revealed to us in many ways, but surely there is none so deep and thorough as in the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. Follow Jesus Christ as He went about the fields and roads of Palestine. He met common men and women, but were they common in His eyes? Peter comes, and Christ sees in him the rock-like firmness behind the superficial impulsiveness. John comes, and He calls him 'Son of Thunder'—He sees the fiery indignation against wrong which is but the other side of love. So with Nathanael, Martha, Mary, the woman who was a sinner; not one was commonplace; each had his or her individual interest, worth, or value. Beneath the surface soil His eye saw the

hidden treasure of every human soul—what that soul might yet grow into by God's help.

Nay, go behind that earthly life and ask why it was lived at all. Our faith is that God was in Christ—that this was the entrance of a Divine Deliverer into this earthly life. What is it that makes the Incarnation reasonable? Surely it is the worth of human nature—that God sees beneath the common, sinful soil of your soul and mine a hidden treasure worth the Incarnation and Crucifixion of His very Son. Once we learn to look at ourselves and at our fellow-men with Christ's eyes, to remember that God will forgive us all except the contempt which makes us hopeless about ourselves and others, then no human soul can ever again be to us common, uninteresting, worthless. The hidden treasure becomes visible. We recognise the great eternal powers of holiness which lie unsuspected in every man we encounter on the street. And let us never forget that Christ is the 'Son of Man,' the perfect example of our human nature, which therefore cannot be despicable.

Or take the familiar field of Scripture. How familiar it is, this Bible of ours, and therefore how unknown!

Imagine that we had never seen it before. Imagine that scholars researching in old libraries in Greece or Palestine or Egypt came by chance on those books which we call the Bible, wiped the dust of ages from them, translated them and gave them to the world for the first time. Can you not feel the shock of wonder that would run through

the civilised world? What a treasure of literature, of morality, of religion it would seem! Not one of us would be blind to the wonder and worth of such writings. It is one of the greatest experiences in life when our eyes are opened and we begin to see that the Bible is something more than a book to be gone through Sunday after Sunday in the public reading of it, and then forgotten as a commonplace of knowledge; when the gold, once hidden, becomes the current coin by which we live, the very coin of the Kingdom of God. The treasure is inexhaustible; ever-new truth lies buried in the ancient pages, waiting for our discovery of it in order to meet every want of the human soul!

Nay, rise to Christ Himself, for He is the Kingdom of Heaven of which He speaks. We walk through the field of His life and know almost every word, every incident. Yet to many He is become absolutely uninteresting, commonplace. We see no beauty that we should desire Him. It is partly that the dust of human creeds, dogmas, theories, controversies, have gathered over and hidden Him. It is partly the soil of our own sins; our ideals and our practice are not His, and therefore He seems to us as but a root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness. And it is partly through familiarity. 'Have you not almost envied the heathen to whom the story of Jesus came unstaled by countless repetitions, with no hardness on its surface from the thoughts and theories which have pressed and handled it for all these thousand years?'

Believe me, no greater experience will ever come

to any man than the discovery of the hidden treasure that lies beneath the surface of the familiar story of that life. The moment we begin to find it, a new conception of human nature rises in the mind, and also a new power. Human nature itself grows richer, nobler, the moment it is seen in His light. Its capacities expand. The Kingdom of Heaven rises as the ideal of all of which man has ever dreamed as a society of perfect righteousness, peace, love, and joy.

And then all this is lifted out of the poor, limited conditions of time and earth and sense, into eternity, Heaven, and God. For, after all, the final end of all this is God. He is the hidden treasure, whether the field be the world, or daily work, or human nature, or Scripture, or Christ, or Heaven. We are heirs of God—not of something He can give us, but of Himself. He is our inheritance. To know Him is eternal life. We are to be partakers of the Divine nature—to be filled unto all the fulness of God. This is the treasure hidden in the familiar life of Jesus Christ: to multitudes only a common-place field to be walked over and forgotten, but to some the hidden treasure of God and all that God is—our own humanity forgiven, cleansed, renewed into the image of God and made fit to enjoy Him for ever.

But, believe me, eyes that strain after unworthy treasures, or which seek to acquire unworthily other treasures, however good in themselves, will never find God Himself. And thus it may be necessary to sell all we have so as to buy the field

in which is hid the true treasure. Where the heart is, there also will the treasure be; and when we love wealth or fame, family or friends, more than God —when we are willing to do wrong for their sakes— then we are not worthy of God, the Great Treasure in Whom we would more fully possess all other treasures. What other treasure is to be compared with Him? To feel that our work, however humble, is being done in His service makes the common task easy and the burden light. He makes us realise the benevolence of Nature and the beauty of His Universe, until in very truth 'the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.' He opens our eyes to what human nature really is: corrupt, yet glorious, worth sending a Christ to save it—the Son of Man Who is the example of perfect humanity. He tells us that He made us for Himself, that we are His heirs. Through Him we are able to see in Scripture the treasure of a perfect morality and religion, the record of a perfect life. Finally, in that perfect life of Christ, God reveals Himself, loving, suffering, dying for His children that He might give them Himself, the perfect treasure. Nothing but the love of God in Christ will enable us to discover this treasure which lies hidden beneath the common field of Nature, of our work, of our fellow-men, of our religion—this treasure which is God Himself.

The Captain of the Young

'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'—MATT. xi. 28.

I TAKE these words because I wish to speak of a certain poem which has retained its hold on my mind. It was found on a dead Australian soldier in Gallipoli, and probably represents his own view, though it was written by a certain Oxford graduate, doubtless when he too was young. It reveals a certain attitude to Jesus, very manly so far as it goes, and yet falling short of that side of His Gospel represented by our text. It is as follows :

'Jesus, whose lot with us was cast,
Who saw it out from first to last ;
Patient and fearless, tender, true,
Carpenter, vagabond, felon, Jew,—
Whose humorous eyes took in each phase
Of full, rich life this world displays ;
Yet evermore kept full in view
The far-off goal it leads us to ;
Who, as your hour neared, did not fail—
The world's fate trembling in the scale—
With your half-hearted band to dine,
And speak across the bread and wine ;
Then went out firm to face the end,
Alone, without a single friend ;

Who felt, as your last words confessed—
Wrung from a proud, unflinching breast
By hours of dull, ignoble pain—
Your whole life's fight was fought in vain.
Would I could win and keep and feel
That heart of love, that spirit of steel ;
I would not to Thy bosom fly
To shirk off till the storms go by ;
If you are like the man you were,
You 'd turn in scorn from such a prayer ;
Unless from some poor workhouse crone
Too toil-worn to do aught but moan.
Flog me and spur me, set me straight
At some vile job I fear and hate ;
Some sickening round of long endeavour,
No light, no rest, no outlet ever ;
All at a pace which must not slack,
Tho' heart would burst, and sinews crack ;
Fog in one's eyes, the brain a-swim,
A weight like lead in every limb,
And a raw pit that hurts like hell,
Where the light breath once rose and fell ;
Do you but keep me, hope or none,
Cheery and staunch till all is done,
And at the last gasp quick to lend
One effort more to help a friend.
And when, for so I sometimes dream,
I 've swum the dark, the silent stream—
So cold it takes the breath away—
That parts the dead world from the day,
And see upon the further strand
The lazy listless angels stand ;
And, with their frank and fearless eyes,
The comrades whom I most did prize ;

Then clear, unburdened, careless, cool,
I 'll saunter down from the grim pool
And join my friends. *Then you 'll come by,*
The Captain of our company,
Call me out, look me up and down,
And pass me through without a frown,
With half-a smile, but never a word ;
And so—I shall have met my Lord.'

I cannot tell how strangely this poem moved me. Allowing for a phrase or two—and even they spring from honesty—it seems to me, for simplicity of spirit, and direct cutting to the heart of things, one of the very best poems the war has brought to our notice. The temper is that of every young man who is true, honest, overflowing with energy, eager to match his strength against some great task of life. The writer rejects with the scorn of such a spirit that attitude which makes of Christ nothing more than a haven of refuge. To him that is a mean use to make of such an One, Who Himself 'saw it out from first to last'—shirked no danger, faced the end alone. He was undoubtedly thinking of one of Charles Wesley's hymns—one which we all think beautiful and restful, but which he rejects passionately as the attitude of the shirker. Take his words,

'I would not to Thy bosom fly
To shirk off till the storms go by,'

and you will see at once that he was thinking of

'Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,

While the nearer waters roll,
  While the tempest still is high ;
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
  Till the storm of life is past ;
Safe into the haven guide ;
  O receive my soul at last ! '

That seems to him an attitude fit only for 'some poor workhouse crone'—not for a man in his full vigour. He would not make Jesus a mere shelter and haven, an excuse for shirking whatever life and death might bring. He would see it out from first to last ; he would swim the grim pool that takes the breath away ; he would stand his Captain's inspection out beyond ; and his Captain would pass him 'with half a smile, but never a word.'

If this seems lacking in humility, remember that it is the natural religious temper of strong and high-souled youth. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden' is indeed a haven of rest to souls wearied out with the storms of life ; but to the strong young soul you say : 'Yes, here is indeed your Captain—One Who will set you great tasks of obedience and achievement which will try your utmost power of endurance ; One Who calls you to jeopard your life in the high places of the field, even as He did Himself.' In truth, there may be too much of a tendency to make Christ a mere refuge. It is done in many ways. A man of the world, who never dreams of venturing his life for Christ—one indeed whose whole life may be a subtle and worldly violation of His will—may yet have it in the background of his mind that, when the

end comes, he will take refuge in the grace and salvation of Christ ; for is not that what He is for—to save sinners, to make up by the merit of His Cross for the defects of men who have to live in the world and be soiled with its dust? And thus a life which has never truly obeyed Christ, never adventured one atom of happiness for His cause, thinks it will at last creep into His bosom and be safe from the final storm of death and what may follow. Or it is some prodigal soul who runs his wild career, and then, when he has wasted both soul and body, thinks it is right and fair to creep to Christ and offer Him the dregs of his being. Or it is some misfortune of life that wrecks us on Christ as on a shore for which we were not steering. Many a life is like a pleasure trip upon the sea, floating up and down the coast of the very being of the Eternal God, absolutely indifferent to that being, until a storm of sickness, adversity, shame, breaks upon the frail boat and quite literally wrecks it on God and Christ. Now, I do not say that, even so, God will not receive—for His mercy endureth for ever ; but surely the attitude of the young writer and the unknown Australian soldier who carried this poem with him to his death is an almost infinitely nobler one. In their young, strong years they would face whatever task Christ set them—would see it through from first to last, even if it led to the cold, silent stream, and would stand their Captain's inspection out beyond. If you say they were too confident—well, it is for their Captain to judge. It is the confidence born of youth—strong, high-souled, in-

experienced. For, sooner or later, even the writer of this poem must have come to that very aspect of Christ which he seems to reject. We all do, if we live long enough, and if the possibility of religious earnestness is in us. It is as if life were constructed for the very purpose of teaching us the meaning of 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Life wears down our strength, our self-confidence, our satisfaction with the world and ourselves; and some day we are thrown bruised and helpless upon God Himself, like a shipwrecked sailor on the shore.

The Bible is full of this final need of God as a haven. Jacob, when he has exhausted all the twists of his dishonesties and cunning, is caught by some terrible hand in the darkness of the night, and all he now cares for is to know his name. Job, after his long suffering, no longer prides himself on his perfection: 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' Psalmist after psalmist is glad to turn to God as the final refuge: 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble'; 'He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock'; 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.' But the author of this poem was young, and being of a high and noble soul he dedicated his young life and strength to the Christ Who had drawn forth his love and admiration—the Christ Who never shirked the work

and perils and pains of life, but 'saw it out from first to last.' In doing so he was absolutely right, as far as he knew. Life must inevitably have taught him the meaning of the hymn from which he shrank :

> 'Jesus, Lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly.'

He would have learnt that every man, no matter how strong and high-souled, comes sooner or later to the need of repair, of rest, of refuge, of a shelter from the storm—whether of his own sins, or the general imperfection of all his work, or the adversities of life, or the breakdown of physical health and its final breakage in death. But when such a man comes to all this, believe me, the rest which Christ gives him will be of a very different quality because of his having devoted the prime of his young powers to Christ, before they had been wasted and broken by the world. So unspeakable is the mercy of God that He rejects not even the prodigal soul that is only flung upon Him against his will by the storms of his own sins ; yet the refuge such a soul finds in Christ cannot be just the same as that of one who never squandered his powers in evil. Both will need Christ as a haven from the storm, but they will need Him in different ways, and the haven and the rest will be as different as the ways.

'Follow Me'

'Follow me.'—MATT. iv. 19.

NOTHING gives a greater sense of the power of our Lord than the transformation He wrought in the character of His first disciples. He passed by the rich, the educated, the leaders of religion, and deliberately called uneducated and unknown men. He would not, of course, choose the worst of the Galilean peasants and fishermen; He must have seen in them possibilities of great moral enthusiasm. Still, try to realise what sort of men those first disciples must have been. Their minds were filled with national and religious prejudices. They regarded the Kingdom of God as a political institution, based on the subjugation of the Gentile nations. We find in them ambition, envy, worldliness, jealousy, boasting, cowardice. They were not worse than others, but their mental and moral state was not very high when Christ said to them, 'Follow me.'

Now, in the course of a few years an extraordinary change passed over these men. We have the writings of some of them, and these have been reverenced for their truth and wisdom by generations of the wisest and best men who have lived. Further, those uneducated peasants and fishermen are among the

great forces that have turned the world into a diviner course. Their Master said they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. He has more than kept His word : they are judging the innumerable tribes of the Gentile world. Even the War is the uprising of their spirit against unrighteousness. They have become fishers of men indeed !

And it is the same spiritual transformation Christ works in all who follow Him in every age ; and I wish to examine it to see if it is being wrought upon ourselves. The first sign of change in the Twelve was an outward and visible one : they obeyed Christ literally—gave up their work, boats and nets, home and kindred, and became wanderers through the land with their Master. Now, is that sacrifice asked of us ? It may be. As our country demands that its citizens forsake all for its defence, so there may arise times of special emergency in the Kingdom of God which demand the same literal forsaking. Yet this is in its nature exceptional. We know that Christ left many of His followers in their homes and daily work—content if they followed in spirit.

And yet the root of the matter is this : that anything even in our outward life that hinders us from following Christ must be given up. If even things right in themselves had to be given up by those first disciples, much more must things that are not right. And as we look round the mere externals of our life, our occupations, homes, friends, companions, do we not find many things that hold us back from

following Christ, or at least following Him fully—habits of physical ease and luxury, customs of the world and business which cannot stand His scrutiny, companionships and ties which hold us back from our own best ideals. And therefore when Christ calls us as He called Peter and the rest, our first duty may be to make a change even in our outward life—to measure all by a new standard.

Now, these outward things can be abandoned in a moment of time. Peter and John gave up their boats and homes at once. But did they follow Christ in spirit as quickly as in body? Far from it. Christ found it far easier to get them to forsake their homes than to abandon pride, ambition, greed, jealousy, intolerance, cowardice. For to follow Christ is much more than a change in the external life. It is a change in the very habits of the soul. It is the growth of divine tempers and dispositions of the heart. It is not even the doing of this or that good thing by itself: it is the gradual formation of a right spirit within, out of which, as from a fountain of life, all good things must flow inexhaustibly. And just this is the change which we see going on in the disciples by the mere process of following this strange Master of theirs. At the beginning their souls were full of ambition. Perhaps it was not so very hard for them to leave their boats and nets: what were these compared with the honours that awaited them? And out of this worldly pride sprang those jealous quarrels for the highest places, the sound of which is heard all through the Gospels. Peter, in spite of his name of rock, is swayed like a

reed by every wind of his own hasty impulses. James and John justify their name, Sons of Thunder, by wishing to call down fire from heaven upon their fellow-men. At every turn the disciples misunderstood their Master's aims. It almost seems as if they were His followers in body alone.

Yet look at these men a few years later—listen to their sermons, read their Epistles, watch the life they live. The change is almost miraculous. The old worldly idea of the Kingdom is gone : it is now a spiritual Kingdom of truth and love. It is no longer for Jews alone : its gates stand open to every nation. The old ambition for the chief places is dead : they are 'clothed in humility' : the cowardice which forsook Christ and fled is gone : they face governors and kings for His sake. The Cross, once a stumbling-block and foolishness, is now their glory. The whole nature of these peasants and fishermen is lifted as by a spiritual miracle into a new and diviner world.

Further, the *minds* of these men underwent an almost incredible development. When Christ found them their minds were filled with the current national ideas of God and man, the world, sin, righteousness. At first His thoughts on all these were too great for them to receive with ease. But they followed Him, and in a few years we find these men moving familiarly in a world of marvellous ideas—ideas so great that the highest minds since have not fathomed their significance. They began with the belief that their Master was human in precisely the same sense as themselves — wiser,

indeed, stronger, but still a mere man. But as they followed Him, they began to feel themselves in the presence of something far above them—something that forced on their minds the strange, inevitable conviction of Divinity. And with this conviction came a host of new and infinite thoughts : a Divine Incarnation—a God Who bears the sins and sorrows of a world—an atonement of love—the unity of the human race in sin and salvation.

Or turn to another change, the *social* change, the new attitude in which He placed these men toward their fellows. When He called them they were imprisoned in the common national conception of the human race. The Kingdom of Heaven was theirs by right divine ; the Gentiles were only worthy to be their slaves. In this exclusive Heaven these ambitious fishers looked to receive the first places, and doubtless to raise their own kindred, whom they had forsaken for a little, to the rank of their own dignities. You know how Christ lifted them out of this pit of selfishness and taught them that the Kingdom of their Master was the heritage which His grace made free to the uttermost parts of the earth. Nay—a much more difficult thing—He poured into them His own great and generous spirit, His own enthusiasm for humanity ; until they were ready to face all privations, persecutions, and dangers, in order to carry this good news to every nation under heaven. The change is almost inconceivable—men who began by quarrelling for the highest places, now ambitious only to be the servants of all, giving up home and country for the

sake of strangers and foreigners, even glorifying in the Cross, once their stone of stumbling and rock of offence !

This was the great and beautiful change which Christ was able to make in His first disciples ; it is the great and beautiful change He is able to work in us as surely as in them. But He is able to make it only on the same condition—that we follow Him. They lived with Him day by day—saw His deeds, heard His words. Often perplexed, they still did continue with Him in His temptations, they still did strive to set their wills in tune with His, following loyally when they could not understand. And thus, hour by hour, the great miracle was wrought. 'Follow me' is the secret of it all. It is one of our great delusions that we think it can be wrought in some other way—perhaps by the reading of the records of their Master which these very men have left us. Without these records what could we know of Christ? Yet the reading of them is not the following of Himself—not the dear companionship. Or we think we can pick up the thoughts and doctrines which the first disciples learnt only by that companionship, and that this second-hand faith will work our salvation. But we cannot take things of the soul thus ready-made from other souls, and find that they have the same power in us. The first disciples did not receive their new life-changing thoughts of God and Man, of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Eternal Kingdom, at second-hand. They simply followed Christ, and out of the life of following their creed grew inevitably, and with

it their power to put it forth in action. Nothing gives this power save this companionship, this friendship of heart with heart: no mere record, no creed at second-hand, nothing but Himself. 'Come unto me'; 'abide in me'; 'without me ye can do nothing'; 'if a man love me, he will keep my words': all these sayings prove that Christ saw that His own personality alone had power to transform the soul.

The Conserving of Energy

'And as thy servant was busy here and there, the man was gone.'—1 KINGS xx. 40.

THIS is a parable, half acted, half spoken, in order to bring home his guilt to Ahab, King of Israel, in allowing Benhadad, King of Syria, to escape out of his hands. This may seem a virtue rather than a sin; but remember the kind of man Benhadad was, and his relations to Israel. The year before, with two-and-thirty tributary kings, he had invaded Palestine and besieged Samaria. He offered terms of peace so tyrannical that Ahab was goaded into a resistance which proved entirely successful: a vast number of the Syrians were slain, and Benhadad himself fled. His advisers induced him to renew the attack the following spring, telling him that the God of the Israelites was a god of the hills who was powerless in the plains: let them fight this time in the plains and victory was secure. A great battle was fought at Aphek, in which, however, the God of Israel showed Himself as powerful in the plains as in the hills. A hundred and twenty thousand Syrians were slain, and their king had to hide for his life in a cellar. In despair of escape he sent to Ahab ambassadors, clad in sackcloth and with ropes round their necks, to sue for mercy.

Now, mercy to Benhadad was anything but mercy to Israel. Ahab was bound by every law of duty to see that his people were protected from this powerful and unscrupulous neighbour. Instead of doing so, he called him his brother, seated him in his chariot beside himself, and exacted no harder terms than the restoration of the cities of Israel taken by Benhadad's father, and certain commercial privileges in the city of Damascus. Three years later, Ahab paid for his folly with his life, fighting against him for Ramoth-Gilead—one of the cities Benhadad had promised to restore. After Ahab's death, the Syrian renewed his siege of Samaria, the citizens suffering appalling agonies of famine. Thus did Israel pay in horrible suffering for the folly of its king in not securing adequate protection for his people, and its fate might well be a warning to others.

The sin is brought home to Ahab by one of the prophets disguised as a wounded soldier. He tells the king that his captain had, during the battle, entrusted a prisoner to him, warning him that he would pay with his life if he allowed him to escape. 'And as thy servant was busy here and there, the man was gone.' Ahab replied that he could do nothing for him—by his own confession his life was forfeit. Then flinging off his disguise, the prophet drove home his own decision on the king himself: 'Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.'

That is the connection of our text with the history

of the time ; but for our purpose the special circumstances may be left out of view. The words suggest that it is quite possible for a man to be a great deal too busy to attend to the particular work entrusted to him.

And this is true of many of us. Think of the rush which sweeps some of us on from week's end to week's end. There are the inevitable calls of our daily work, social duties, the newest books to skim, reviews to glance at, the newspapers twice a day, concerts and lectures, and, with young people, classes to prepare for and attend. Think of this everlasting busy-ness continuing through our life year after year ; and then let us ask ourselves whether it is really a good way of spending our lives. Surely the words of the prophet are true in a sense he did not mean : ' As thy servant was busy here and there, *the man* was gone ' ; not another man, but the man within ourselves. Nothing worth calling manhood can be developed by this confusion which we call life. Many of us are wasting our best powers by the multiplicity of our engagements. We never know any one subject well—never do any one duty well—never grow to be men or women worth anything, just because we are always busy here and there ; always trying to do too many things, and doing nothing properly. We are like Matthew Arnold's restless travellers, who

> ' See all sights from pole to pole,
> And glance and nod and bustle by,
> And never once possess their soul
> Before they die.'

This is one of the greatest temptations of our time; and its greatest danger is that given in the text—the neglect of some definite duty. It was not the soldier's business to be 'busy here and there.' His captain gave him one definite duty to do, to guard a prisoner. Other things might, indeed, be very important in themselves, but they were not for him.

Precisely so is it with many of us. God has given us a certain definite duty to perform. For instance, a young man's duty is to concentrate on that course of training necessary for his future work. Doubtless there is much reading he would like to do, many interests he would like to share with others, and he will be all the better for escaping sometimes from his work. Nevertheless, he has no right to be so busy elsewhere as to neglect his preparation for his lifework.

Again, it would surprise us if we knew how often duty to our families is neglected because we are busy here and there—not necessarily in wrong or frivolous ways. A father may be absorbed in his business or profession. The son of a certain great lawyer drifted into crime. When the judge who tried him asked if he remembered his father, he replied, 'Perfectly; whenever I entered his presence he said, "Run away, my lad, and don't trouble me."' He was too busy here and there—had too important a profession to serve to teach his son the common morality which would have saved him from the prisoner's dock. Or a mother may really have no time to give to her own family. Society makes many demands—pleasure makes more—sometimes

religion completes the evil : she has many schemes on hand, many meetings to attend. She must hand her children over to strangers and rob both herself and them of that companionship which is their priceless heritage.

There is something far wrong in this. By the mere fact of our parenthood we are certainly as responsible to God for our children as the soldier was to his captain for his prisoner. We are not at liberty to neglect their best welfare. There may be many other interesting things in the world—many schemes which may even be duties for others but not for you. Have outside interests, certainly, but be very careful to mark the line at which business, society, or even religion begin to encroach on our duty to our own children, lest we should have to say, ' As we were busy here and there, they were gone '—beyond our control, beyond any love or care for us. I have heard of a preacher who, when his sons ruined themselves, spoke with unavailing sorrow from the text, ' They made me keeper of the vineyard, but mine own vineyard have I not kept ' : he had been so busy with Church work, so busy trying to train other people's children, that he forgot his own.

Do not think, however, that we should discourage the doing of any work for the Church. To some it is a duty, but many, both preachers and laymen, attempt so much religious work that they accomplish little. Many a congregation defeats its own best interests by setting up a standard of work so impossible that either the health of the

clergyman breaks down or the work is not done thoroughly.

It is difficult to realise the harm this busy-ness does to the character of the man himself and to the cause of religion. Every religious worker ought to decide what is his chief duty, and then refuse to endanger that duty by a multiplicity of extra engagements.

Let us, then, realise that in the life of every man there must be some one central duty, and that all other interests must be judged by their relation to it. Our chief duty may be our daily work, or the care of a family, or some religious work : whatever it is, we must distrust anything which threatens to make us neglect it. Let us certainly be always ready to hold out a helping hand to those who need it, even if the opportunity comes outside our actual duty ; let us be many-sided, with wide interests, for then we shall come the fresher to our own work, but let us not waste our energies in overmuch busy-ness.

Once more, remember that unless we thus simplify our life to some one centre of duty, our fellow-men cannot rely on us. The captain found this soldier unreliable simply because he would not do the one duty he was given. So also the doctor with an over-large practice cannot give the necessary care to each individual, and therefore sacrifices his patient's lives to his busy-ness. The preacher often does so much talking that in the end he speaks without passing his words through the fire of his own living emotions until his own character and

that of his hearers deteriorate—for all unreal speech about sacred things is ruinous to character. Undue busy-ness produces unreliable work, unreliable character, and a crowd of evil effects on ourselves and our fellow-men.

In short, what is wanted is the true soldier spirit of unquestioning obedience. Had the soldier of our text been a true soldier he would have confined himself to guarding his prisoner, simply because his superior officer commanded him. Now, you and I are as much under God's authority as any soldier under his captain's. It is not for us to choose our work at the bidding of our own wills. Our one business in the great warfare between good and evil which is going on now as in Ahab's day is simply to know as clearly as we can our Captain's orders—the post He has set us at—the duty He has commanded us: and then to allow no distractions to make us busy here and there in other things.

The world had been a better place if every Christian regarded himself as the soldier of God—not at liberty to ask the reason for this command or that, far less to neglect that chief duty which the will of his Captain has ordered him to do. You remember how the Knights of the Round Table abandoned the work that lay nearest them for the Quest of the Holy Grail: broke up their goodly company, and returned, a few of them, to a city ruined through their neglect of duty; and how King Arthur reminded them of his prophecy that 'most of them would follow wandering fires, "lost in the quagmire."'

'And some among you held that, if the King
Had seen the sight, he would have sworn the vow:
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
That which he rules, and is but as the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plow.
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done.'

Not through neglect of duty do visions come. Let them come, said Arthur, when his work is done. Nay, rather, they visit him even now, simply because he tries to do his best for his kingdom, not 'leaving human wrongs to right themselves.' Many a time the unsought visions come to the king, not in a strange and dazzling splendour, but in a new perception of familiar nature, of himself, of God :

'Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
This air that smites his forehead is not air
But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again '—

no mere vision but an actual reality to the man who faithfully did his duty.

'And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is at the gate! And the three brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: but David would not drink of it, but poured it out to the Lord. And said, My God forbid it me, that I should do this thing: shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it.'—1 CHRON. xi. 17-19.

THE terrible circumstances of the time give to these words a new and poignant force. At first it seems merely wayward of David to long for water, and then, when it is given, to pour it out upon the ground. Yet there is no story of his life more noble. He is in the Cave of Adullam, not far from his native town, and the hunted outlaw, remembering the days when he used to water his flocks at the well by the gate, longs for a draught of the old, familiar water. Yet when three of his captains break through the lines of the enemy and bring him the longed-for draught, he feels that he cannot drink it—it is virtually the blood of brave men. It is the inconsistency of a noble and generous heart.

The story seems to me a picture of the relations between man and man which ought to exist all the world over. Our whole life is at this very moment

founded on the courage and toils, the sacrifice and jeopardy, of other lives. Ask yourselves how has this fair flower of our Christian land grown out of the dark and rugged root of our savage forefathers. The dew that watered it was the blood of men. The privileges of law and order, freedom, education, and religion are like that draught of Bethlehem water—men put their lives in jeopardy to gain them. Constantly we see the picture rising in the history of the world: the Philistines, enemies of man's higher life, ranged round the well that has the power to quench our thirst, and a few gallant hearts breaking through the lines of the foes and snatching a draught of the sacred waters of truth and law, knowledge and religion. It will make a vast difference in our own souls whether we drink the water, thus dearly bought, for our own selfish pleasure; or whether, feeling the sacredness of this life of ours, made possible only by the shedding of human blood, we pour it out as a sacrifice to God.

Examples are so familiar that we scarcely see them. Fathers spend laborious, anxious days to provide food, clothing, homes, education for their children—often beyond what is demanded by duty. Mothers surround them with a sleepless anxiety for what they believe to be their welfare. Alas! how often the sacrifice is not even guessed by those for whom it is made! Extravagance perhaps repays the frugality of parents and denies them the comforts due to their old age. Nay, children sometimes despise the love that has made them what they are. They count their parents old-fashioned, narrow, and

behind the age—which indeed perhaps they are. But surely underneath all that there is something which ought to claim their reverence. Is there not something strangely and appealingly pathetic in the very physical decay of our fathers and mothers? The wrinkles and furrows of the face, the thin hair touched with frost, the form beginning to bend graveward: do these things mean nothing more than the inevitable changes of time? How often they are also the scars inflicted on them in the battle of life which they fought for us their children! It must always be at the peril of our own best life that we dare to drink that sacred water for our light and selfish pleasure. Many a youth might have been saved from the prodigal's career by clearly understanding the price his parents have paid for him and for his life—and it is, after all, the right of children to be allowed to know the cost at which their welfare is bought. By their frugal, simple lives they left him an inheritance of health, and he squanders that inheritance. They saved rigorously to leave him the earnings of a lifetime, and the money only opens the door to evils otherwise closed. They denied themselves to give him education, and he uses the education to give a finer edge to his unworthy pleasures, or to disgrace the honourable name they bore. His career of selfishness is, in the moral meaning of it, drinking the life-blood of his parents, as is also the more widespread indifference, if not hostility, towards parents. If they love themselves, children should avoid even the possibility of that poignant after-regret for callousness and un-

kindness, than which nothing is sadder or more terrible—and so too with all the relationships of life.

And all this is equally true of society as a whole. Do we ever realise that all our life is rooted in the dangers, toils, and sacrifices of our fellow-men? Society is built up of class upon class, and the privileges of the higher must rest on the sacrifices of the lower. A multitude of the common occupations of life involve such dangers to life and limb, that the men engaged in them never know when they go out in the morning if they will ever return. You remember the homely words of Lady Nairne's song:

> 'When ye were sleepin' on your pillows,
> Dreamed ye aught o' our puir fellows,
> Darklin' as they faced the billows,
> A' to fill our woven willows? . . .
> Wha 'll buy my caller herrin'?
> Tho' ye may ca' them vulgar farin',
> Wives and mithers maist despairin'
> Ca' them lives o' men!'

Let not the homely Scottish words seem beneath the dignity of this day and this Communion Table, spread in remembrance of One Who was Himself a working man—the Carpenter of Nazareth.

To take a still wider view, think how whole classes of the community may be sacrificed for other classes. The higher culture of the educated is possible only because there are men who labour with their hands, and never have the chance of

culture. You go to a 'gentleman's house,' and mark the signs of taste in furniture, books, pictures, music. You see his wife and children, refined and educated. From what dark, rough, unlovely roots underground does this fragrant flower of home-life spring? We all know from what roots—from gloomy factories and dusty workshops, from dark mines and glowing furnaces. But for the sacrifice of whole classes, the leisure, the refinement, the soft hands and bright eyes of this home could not exist—at least in that form. In so far as any of us share in this life of higher education and culture, we do so at the cost of multitudes of our fellows. Many have had to live in ignorance and drudgery that we might receive education; many in dark, close, unlovely homes that our homes might be filled with light and beauty. As one of those favoured ones wrote:

> 'Our lives are beautiful thro' drudgeries
> Of theirs, which left them rest and space to grow
> Thro' generations to the perfect curve;
> Our hair has got the gold because the dust
> Of the world's highways never soiled the feet
> Of our forefathers; and the blue-veined hands
> Were moulded to their tenderness of touch
> By centuries of service rude and hard'—

centuries of service performed by those whom Carlyle describes in words which I have often quoted to you, because they never leave my mind. He is speaking of 'the toil-worn Craftsman that with earth-made Implement laboriously conquers the Earth, and makes her man's. Honourable to

me,' he says, 'is the hard Hand; crooked, coarse; wherein notwithstanding lies a cunning virtue, indefeasibly royal, as of the Sceptre of this Planet. Venerable too is the rugged face, all weather-tanned, besoiled, with its rude intelligence; for it is the face of a Man living manlike. O, but the more venerable for thy rudeness, and even because we must pity as well as love thee! Hardly-entreated Brother! For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our Conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so marred. For in thee too lay a God-created Form, but it was not to be unfolded; encrusted must it stand with the thick adhesions and defacements of Labour; and thy body, like thy soul, was not to know freedom.' If you ask what change I propose in this sacrificial system of society, I answer that the change must begin in our own souls. We might at least recognise the sacrifice, and refuse to drink the blood of men in light and thoughtless ease. Perhaps out of that recognition would come in due time wonderful changes and more generous brotherhoods.

Again, think of the price at which our national life has been purchased in the past, is being purchased now. We take it for granted. We were born into it, and cannot imagine what life would be without it. I do not say that our Empire has come to us without many a wrong and evil deed; but as little has it come to us without tens of thousands of sacrifices. Our bodily comforts, our scientific advances, our civil and political order, our art and

literature, our religious liberties, were not created by us : thinkers broke down the frontiers of ignorance that now every child might be taught ; statesmen at the jeopardy of their lives crushed injustice that we might live in safety ; our Empire has been bought with the life of many a gallant soldier and sailor ; our religious liberties were not secured without the martyrs' fires. And the martyrs' fires are not extinguished yet. Where would our homes be this day had Belgium not offered herself to the flames, and so made us the debtors of the poorest, yes, of even the most unworthy of her subjects ? Where would our towns and cities be were it not that millions have sacrificed themselves in France and Italy, Russia and Serbia ? What would be the fate of Britain if our own brave men in hundreds of thousands had not given life and limb for us ? Believe me, from this time onward there is no breath of freedom that we shall ever draw, no bread that we shall ever eat, no draught of water from the well, that is not the blood of men. Are our men to return to the soldiers' usual fate—to starve neglected while we sit at ease ? The sure and final test of every soul of us will be, whether in selfish indifference we drink that blood of brave men, or, feeling that it is too sacred to be thus dishonoured, pour it out in thanksgiving to the Lord.

And now, let us not fear to associate all this with the Great Sacrifice which we this day commemorate. Christ, Whose dying is the world's life, gave Himself for us : He offered Himself through the Eternal Spirit : He poured out His soul unto death. We

cannot know the infinite benedictions He thus won for us : not merely a new and better order of government here below, but blessings that break the bounds of earth and time and overflow into eternity —the overcoming of death, the forgiveness of sins, the unspeakable hope of immortality, the victory of the Kingdom of God over all evil, the new heavens and the new earth, the vision of God. Through the ranks of all our spiritual foes He broke, and brought us the living water from the Well of Life, even Life Everlasting. It was no easy task ; it was accomplished only with agony, ' with strong crying and tears.' And therefore it is a question involving the issues of judgment—what attitude of the soul are we taking up to this great sacrifice ?

> ' Sae dear that joy was bought, John,
> Sae free the battle fought, John,
> That sinfu' man e'er brought
> To the Land o' the Leal.'

Can we despise the high spiritual life which He has made possible, without sinning against our own souls ? Above all, can we by any possibility receive any of the blessings of that sacrifice, if we never seek to share in the spirit of sacrifice ? To worship One Who bore the world's sins and sorrows, yet never once let those sins and sorrows darken our hearts with grief or pity ; to sing hymns of praise to Him for hanging on the Cross for us, while we ourselves take care not to touch it with our little finger ; to regard the Cross as a Divine contrivance for the saving of our soul, while of other souls we

are absolutely careless : what is all this but drinking in a most unworthy selfishness the very blood of Christ? 'This do, in remembrance of me' has been interpreted as meaning, 'Take up your Cross. Let your own body be broken for the sake of others, if necessary.' And indeed, to follow the example of Christ is the only true way of honouring His memory.

Our whole life, therefore, is cradled in the sacrifice of others—from the great Sacrifice on Calvary down to that of the meanest toiler by whose work we live ; and, believe me, no high, generous, and chivalrous character can ever be quickened in a soul content to use for the mere pleasure and comfort of his life the vast multitude of blessings which were won only by the jeopardy and the laying down of the lives of brave men.

'May He find a Place for the Tears'

'Who passing through the valley of Baca' (Revised Version, Weeping), 'make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools.'—PSALM lxxxiv. 6.

IT is uncertain who wrote this psalm—some one obviously who loved the Temple courts, and was unable meantime to enter them. He envies the sparrows and swallows, free to make the altar their nest; envies the very doorkeepers; envies most of all the pilgrims on their way to 'appear every one of them before God in Zion.' In imagination he follows them until they come to some valley now unknown, called the valley of Baca. Baca!—Weeping!—ah! he thinks, with a glad play upon the word, there will be no weeping there; or rather the very tears and sorrows of the pilgrimage will turn into a well to refresh the thirsty, weary travellers. The idea, then, is the transformation of our very sorrows into water to quench our thirst. Let us see if it is a true idea, a real experience, anything better than a play on the name of some old Hebrew valley long lost from out the memory of men.

To every soul there comes this valley of weeping somewhere in the course of life's pilgrimage, and the whole meaning of the pilgrimage depends on how

we pass through it. Some day something happens, and we feel instinctively that life can never be quite the same again. It may be a great thing or a little, but it changes earth and sky for us. But what is the change? What new light is to be poured upon the landscape—or what new darkness is to brood upon it? It depends almost entirely on how we meet the sorrow. The first instinct is to flee from this Valley of Weeping—to get far away from it somehow, and if possible forget it. 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.' It is a most natural instinct, this of flight. For there is something sharp, burning, haunting in the first real touch of grief. It startles the imagination and sets it flying like a wounded bird against its cage, hurting itself the more. It counts over wearily the days to come. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, and every morrow, this pain will endure, this sore memory, this wound within the heart. When we wake in the morning the shadow will be there to darken the sunlight; when the evening falls it will be still there to deepen the gloom. And then in the intolerable pain we look round for some door of escape. Some try to escape boldly, violently—they will break a door out into some other world or into mere nothingness. Alas, poor souls! into what other Valley of Weeping elsewhere they may descend, we cannot tell; for it is no real escape unless they can escape from themselves. They must carry the

trouble with them, and we know not 'what dreams may come.'

Most, however, try other doors of escape. A man thinks that a new country, with new scenes, circumstances, society, will give another chance of happiness. He will forget and be his old self again. Or we commit ourselves to the healing power of time. At first we dread the coming and going of the days—we multiply our sorrow with the very multitude of them: but a second thought comes—that the heart will grow accustomed to pain. Or we try a nobler escape—work, occupation. If the work is right and good, it is perhaps the best escape possible, short of the very highest; and some of the best, strongest, most strenuous work in the world has been done in this terrible way, as a door of escape from some pain, or loss, or trouble. And almost the saddest way of flight from this Valley of Weeping—sadder far than the valley itself—is when a man seeks some low form of forgetfulness, when he has not enough manhood to face his trouble, when it is a torture to be alone with himself, and therefore his own self must be drugged, deadened, that he may be able to live with it at all.

Now, none of these is the highest and best way to pass through the Valley of Weeping, simply because they are attempts to escape from the sorrows—to flee out of the valley altogether. Grief is too large and constant a part of life merely to be shunned. The idea of this text and of many another is that we are to remain in the valley until we have discovered in it wells of water—refreshment and solace. The

joy is to come actually out of the pain. We are to dig down into the valley itself—down into the very sorrow, until we find somewhere in the heart of it water for our sorest thirst. We are not simply to flee from it by change of place, or passage of time, or absorption in work, or unworthy forgetfulness. All this is to lose the very meaning of sorrow. He who tries to escape in any of these ways may indeed gain a certain kind of relief, but seldom is it noble, and never truly satisfying. The relief he gains is but the return upon him of his unsatisfied thirst—a new kind of thirst, perhaps, but often a more burning. There is no final satisfaction save in the heart of the sorrow itself, in the very soil of the Valley of Weeping.

It was not that we might flee from the valley that God brought us thither. We must remain — yet mere remaining also has its dangers. Sometimes we come across a man or woman who seems to do nothing but wander up and down the valley of some grief, yet who never attempts to dig down into the valley to find the water of life. Others, again, seem to dig in vain. Nothing is more pathetic than the way in which the human race continues to believe that sorrow has a meaning and a purpose. Generation after generation of us dig deep into the valley of suffering no matter how often disappointed, in the unquenchable hope of finding water for our thirst. Be quite sure an instinctive hope like this is not mistaken—the water *is* there for the finding. How then is it that so many give it up in despair? My friends, do you not see how it is? Read the

second half of the verse : 'the rain also filleth the pools.' We are searching for a meaning and purpose in some grief that has come on us—digging a well in the Valley of Weeping if haply we may come upon water to refresh our souls : and, behold, we find none—only dry, hot sand. We have forgotten that every drop of water must originally come from the great heavens above.

We have been searching for water apart from them. We have not waited for God's pouring out of the waters of consolation ; but apart from Him we can receive them no more than the pools can be filled save from the treasuries of the rain above. The only water which quenches the thirst of our sorrow is just God Himself ; apart from Him there is, there can be, no rain to fill the pools, to replenish the springs hid deep beneath the surface. What is it you and I really want in the Valley of Weeping ?—what is the thirst behind every thirst ? Nothing less than the thirst for God, the living God. That is why we are so restless, so ill at ease. At the root of our whole being is this need for God—an original part of our very constitution as men ; and we cannot be satisfied until we find Him. This is why we pass on from object to object, from hope to hope, ever seeking yet never finding. In the *Convito*, Dante says : 'The strongest desire of everything is to return to its source. And since God is the source of our soul and has made it like unto Himself . . . therefore this soul desires above all things to return to Him. And like a pilgrim who is going by a road he has never travelled, who

believes each house that he sees from afar to be his inn, and, disappointed in this one, puts faith in the next, and so on from house to house until he comes to the inn : so our soul, as soon as she enters upon the new and never-travelled path of this life, directs her eyes towards her Supreme Good, and still, whatever thing she sees that seems to have some good in it, believes that to be what she seeks. Whence we see children longing above all things for an apple ; and as they get on a little, wanting a bird ; and further advanced, wishing for fine clothes ; and then a horse, and then a wife, and then moderate wealth, and then more and more. And this happens, because in none of these things does the soul find that which she seeks, and always believes she will find it further on.' No words could be truer. Being made for God, it is for Him we are searching in *all* our searchings. To all eternity no other water will quench our thirst. And just this is the purpose of the Valley of Weeping : to open up a pool which He may fill with the rain from heaven, the water of His own truth and love and joy—that we may find Himself in every sorrow and, drinking of that Fountain of Life, be satisfied. It is a great experience when the rain of heaven thus fills the pools of the Valley of Weeping—when a sorrow opens up, and behold, in the very heart of it God Himself. You are going on in perfect physical health, so carried on by its vigour that you are scarce conscious that there is anything but the body. And then suddenly by accident or disease you are struck down. It is hard to lie still and let the busy

world of which you were once a part go by. And then gradually there emerges out of the broken, disabled body the long neglected soul, the thirsting unsatisfied spirit, conscious at last that it was made for God. Or you have had many a long year of a worldly life so prosperous that you felt no need of the treasure that might be laid up in Heaven. And then the strong and bitter wind of poverty blew the mist of wealth away, and behold, close to you all the time, there stands—who but God Himself, Father of your spirit, Maker of all worlds! For a handful of *one* world you were losing Him and the eternal wealth of His wisdom and love and truth. Or one has passed from your side into the darkness and the silence who was the other half of life to you. And then in marvellous ways there opens up in the very heart of the Valley of Weeping a fountain of living water. The soul that seems so far away has grown strangely near. The veil that hides, also reveals it. We see for the first time how fair and true it was. And then the world beyond, which was a name before, is reality now. It shines before the inner eye. Surely it is consolation to think of the soul new-born into that eternal life and peace and joy:

'Up above, a crowned and happy spirit,
Like an infant in the eternal years,
Who shall grow in love and light for ever,
Ordered in his place among his peers.

'O the rest for ever, and the rapture,
And the hand that wipes the tears away,
And the golden homes beyond the sunset,
And the hope that watches o'er the clay.'

Do you not see how thus again and again the Valley of Weeping becomes a place of springs filled with Heaven's own rain—how again and again the heart of some great sorrow opens, and there is God Himself, and Heaven and love and light and joy? Could we ever regret any suffering that brought such water for our thirst—the thirst beneath every thirst? Or could we ever reach such springs of life by mere flight from the Valley of Weeping?

The most courageous Prayer on Earth

'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'—Rev. xxii. 20.

It would form an interesting study to examine the changes of attitude in the Christian Church towards the second coming of Christ. To the Apostolic Church it was a great and joyful hope: the end of bondage—emancipation into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Later the joy and hope faded away, and the Advent of their Lord became to Christians that awful terror which breathes in the terrible hymn, the *Dies irae*:

> 'Day of wrath! O day of mourning!
> See fulfilled the prophet's warning,
> Heaven and earth in ashes burning!'

In our own time the Church as a whole is moved by neither fear nor hope of the Second Advent. We still retain it as part of our Creed. We still read the words, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' But we do so with an easy piety, and it is doubtful whether any of us could say them at all if we attached the same tremendous meaning to them as did the writer of this book.

For you have only to read Revelation to see that to its author the coming of Christ was a vast, awful, and universal process in the history of the world by which evil in every form was being judged,

condemned, destroyed. Church after Church is arraigned and judged. Form after form of secular evil is overwhelmed—human, as in the woman on the seven hills ; or lower yet, brutish, as in the horned beasts ; or lowest of all, reptile, in the shape of serpent and dragon. The book is filled with sounds of the infinite conflict, blowing of trumpets, peals of thunder, march of armies, shock of battle, cries of the combatants.

All this is what the writer means when he prays, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' When we use the words, we think of the gentle inflow of Christ's power, coming silently as the dawn mounts in the morning sky. But St. John thought of the wild conflict of good and evil : the crash and thunder of the storm, and Christ coming as he pictures Him in the opening chapter—with those eyes of flame which burned their way into every evil in Church and world, with those feet like unto burnished brass which trod down all unrighteousness. And it is a very serious question for every one of us whether we can really pray, ' Even so, come, Lord Jesus ' : even so, in this triumphant righteousness which wars against everything unrighteous until it is cast down and trampled out of existence by those coming feet—that kills the sin, while saving the sinner. Are we really prepared to pray such a prayer, to abide by it, and to adjust our lives and fortunes to the answer to it ?

This may seem an exaggerated or even a hysterical view. The coming of Christ, many think, is much more gentle than all this. Let us then appeal to

the plain facts of history. The central fact of our era is that Christianity—since every great ideal must needs arouse the opposition of lesser ideals—has been not peace but a sword: in the Church, in the world, or in the individual soul. Its thoughts are too powerful to remain inactive. They challenge the philosophies of the world; they fight the fight out to the end. Similarly, the ethics of Christianity are too radical to give any final quarter to any other code of morality: even if for a time Christian morality seems to make a compromise with a lower code, in the end the peace is broken up—the inner contradiction reveals itself almost invariably in the form of a severe conflict.

We see it again and again in the history of nations. Some unrighteousness enters into the substance of the national life—some injustice or oppression. In the end it breaks out into war or revolution—sometimes literal, sometimes political, social, industrial war: the evil is crushed or maimed often after a great conflict and agony. Out of even the Great War came freedom for many small nations. We are accustomed to trace such conflicts to other causes; but we do not get down to the deepest root until we see that they are movements of the coming of Christ, part of His great struggle against the prince of this world, against the beast, the dragon, and the serpent, even though men may not be consciously thinking of Him at all. It is that Divine righteousness which He cast like a sword into the world fighting down the various forms which national unrighteousness assumes.

All this becomes even more visible in the Church. I do believe Christ is coming in the Church, in spite of all the pessimists. But the Church has never grown in knowledge, in morality, in insight into the spirit of its Lord, without struggle. We talk of the terrible unrest of men's minds—their doubts, scepticisms, infidelities, reactions into superstitions —as if this were a new and entirely evil thing. Yet similar movements of thought—wild, restless, breaking out into all forms of fantastic heresy and superstition—have swept again and again across the Christian Church ; and I think they have been invariably the prelude to some coming of the Son of Man. They are the sign that men's minds are outgrowing the current forms of Christian thought, searching about for new forms—searching often blindly at first. But at last the long, tumultuous movement issues in a new development of Christian thought, a new height gained from which to see the world of things.

Similarly with the forms of the life and work of the Church. It is in the nature of forms to grow formal, dead, sources of corruption. When they are new, their very freshness gives them life and power. Then, in process of the centuries, the best forms gather to themselves abuses, the life goes out of them, and it becomes necessary that they be cast away.

> ' The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

And this is the Lord of the Church driving it to

new modes of life. It is the spirit of Christ breaking up ancient and familiar forms whenever they have ceased to fulfil their purpose. And the old forms invariably refuse to yield without a struggle which may involve great suffering to multitudes on both sides. For usually in such movements our own individual lives and fortunes are caught in the inexorable wheels of change—caught and apparently crushed.

Now, all this is what is involved in the coming of Christ, and therefore it is a great and difficult thing to say from the heart, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' His coming may mean the passing away of an old world, the birth-pangs of a new one—conflicts in world and Church—struggles of Christ's spirit against unrighteousness —the shaking of what can be shaken that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. How many of us are sincerely ready for such advents of the Son of Man—possess such open minds and souls as to welcome the passing away of familiar forms of faith and life in order that Diviner forms may be born? Or, to touch our consciences more to the quick, how many of us would welcome some great social change in the direction of truer Christian justice, if it meant, as it might easily mean, the ruin of some source of gain in our personal life and fortune?—for usually the fortunes of individuals are involved more or less in such great movements.

Not one in a hundred of us is able to say sincerely: 'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus'; and until we are, our Christianity must be, if not false, narrow in range and poor in quality.

Let us, then, remind ourselves of the unspeakable vitality of the Christian religion. It is the fashion to speak of it as an exhausted force—a thing which humanity has outgrown in thought and life. If it were a little scheme of things, this might easily be so; but I am quite sure that, so far from its being a spent force, its true power is but beginning to be understood. The more deeply we enter into the spirit of Christ, the surer we must grow of the inexhaustible riches of His religion.

If it is thus vital, great movements of change are only to be expected. To deny this is to deny that Christianity is great and vital. It is to affirm that it has already reached its maturity, and borne its final fruit. No Christian ought even to seem to believe this. There is more of truth, righteousness, love in Christianity than has ever yet found expression or embodiment in human thought or institution or life. It is an eternal ideal of goodness, and, like the sky, no matter how far we climb the mountains, it remains as far as ever above our heads.

In the third place, we must learn even to welcome the conflict as sign and proof of the coming of Christ. When Jesus said, 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword,' He was declaring the law of His Kingdom, not for His own lifetime merely, but to the end of time; for every great idea creates division of opinion, and therefore a sword. His cause could advance only by struggle. Of necessity it divides men into friends and foes: there is no real neutrality —not for is against, and not against is for. And

this struggle for and against His spirit may be in process among those who think they know Him not. Hence we should learn to look at the unrest and antagonisms of a time like ours, not merely with quiet eyes, but even with positive joy. It is proof of the vitality, the strong dividing and judging power, of our religion. It is Christ riding forth conquering and to conquer. It is the trumpets and the thunder of the battle-march of this book of Revelation. It is the power of Christian truth and righteousness breaking up old forms of faith and life that new and better forms may appear. And in all this Christians should be able to pray from the heart, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'

But if we are to be able to pray thus, we must learn to welcome the coming of Christ in our own individual lives. There, too, He comes not with peace, but a sword. For it is comparatively easy to have a certain low and worthless peace, if we refuse to let Him enter our lives. I settle my faith in certain forms once for all—lay it on the shelf as a thing finished and perfect—refuse to look at anything which might necessitate a readjustment of it—and I do certainly gain thereby an ignoble peace by simply refusing to allow Christ to come with any new truth which might disturb the old.

Or I settle my life, work, and habits once for all—there is my scheme of life; I am not going to alter it for any one. It may be founded on something wrong in myself, or something iniquitous in the social system, so that my very existence and prosperity depend on evil; but I am not going to raise

these disquieting fundamental questions of right and wrong. And once more I gain peace, such as it is, by the simple process of not allowing any coming of Christ into my life. I do not want the new experiences He would bring—the unsettling of the old, the difficulties of the new.

Do you not see how great an achievement of grace it is to be able to say sincerely, 'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus'—come as Thou hast always come, with a sword, with increase of truth which will compel us to change our poor schemes of doctrine, with increase of righteousness which will force us to break up our unrighteous ways of life? It is a great prayer and demands a great courage. The man who can pray it honestly has no need to wait for some dim and distant day of judgment at the end of the ages: every day is judgment day, and every day he stands before the Son of Man.

The Secret Flaw

'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'—ROMANS vii. 24.

DELIVERANCE—that is assuredly our first and greatest need: not simply from the painful consequences of sin, but from sin itself, the power and tyranny of it. All feel the need some time—perhaps only for a passing moment, perhaps almost for a whole lifetime. Our modern efforts to explain away moral responsibility merely show how eager we are to feel we are not responsible, to rid us of the haunting sense of discomfort which our fathers called remorse, and which all our comforting theories cannot entirely banish. And all at some period of their life make some effort to escape from the bondage, to shake off 'the body of this death,' the horrible thing that clings to their very souls.

Many of us think that the great deliverer is simply Time. We seem to outgrow so many things—the toys of childhood, the high spirits of youth, our young and foolish thoughts and ambitions. All these we leave behind as the larger life of manhood lays hold of us. And thus, it is often thought, we can outgrow sin—leave it behind like the toys of childhood and the follies of youth.

And, indeed, there is sometimes an appearance

of truth in this. Many a respectable and even venerable man of later life, in his youth sowed his wild oats with lavish hand. Is he then really delivered from the body of this death? Far be it from me to say that this never happens, but it never happens by the passage of years alone. Time cannot be the saviour of the soul, and make God unnecessary. What usually happens is simply this. First of all, the impetuosity of youth cools. We would be astonished if we only knew how much of the respectability around us, even in the Church, is due to this one cause.

In the next place, time brings a change of mind—not the philosophic mind of which the poet speaks, far less the religious, but simply the respectable, the worldly. For the sake of his prospects in life, a man pulls himself together, settles steadily to work, and in the end achieves worldly success and a good social standing.

All this is the history of multitudes of respectable men of the world. Have they, then, been truly delivered from 'the body of this death'? To begin with, such men have not, as they themselves imagine, got rid of their earlier sins and finally settled accounts with them. They are not so easily dismissed—they have inoculated the entire character with their poison; and ignoring them cannot make them as if they had never been.

It follows that the failings of youth are not really outgrown—time has only transformed them into another kind of sin. Worldliness is the saviour of thousands; one demon casts out another. This is

usually all that is meant by 'a reformed man': he is simply re-formed—the old sin has re-formed itself into a new sin. That is the extent of the deliverance mere time can work: it can create the worldly mind; it can *reform* sin from shape to shape; but we should never delude ourselves with the idea that it can do more.

We come to a higher range of things when we turn to what is so much talked of nowadays—the power, namely, of healthy interests to save from sin. The idea underlying this is that sin is the result of ignorance, of dull, colourless surroundings, of monotonous emptiness of life. Give men education, enlighten their minds, surround them with colour, music, brightness, give them healthy physical exercise, bring them into intimate contact with the great Mother, Nature — and the deliverance is accomplished.

And there is much truth in this. The employer, the Government, that provides adequate opportunities for right amusement is serving God in a very real way. If we grind down the poor to a dull monotony of serfdom, without change or enjoyment, we shall not be held guiltless. The human mind cannot remain empty, and it must be filled with healthy interests. But can even such high interests accomplish the great and final deliverance of which St. Paul is thinking? Other kinds of deliverance they can accomplish — but can they accomplish this? Do we not all know that many educated men whose lives were filled to overflowing with knowledge, colour, music, brightness, have been

swept by something within themselves into the deepest wrong-doing? Do we not know that again and again in the history of nations there have come ages when education, culture, art, blossomed into a perfect poison-flower of luxury and excess which destroyed whole communities—so that, instead of being delivered from, they were delivered to the body of this death?

But let us say that education, culture, art, do actually deliver from certain outward forms of evil. Ask yourselves, did St. Paul think of no more than that? He was no uneducated man before his conversion, drifting into prodigalism through sheer vacuity of mind and lack of interests. He was a man of strict morality—'as touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless.' Why, then, does he cry, 'O wretched man that I am!'? He tells us why in verses seven and eight. His sin was coveting. The other nine commandments relate to external deeds and words, but the tenth took one step within the boundaries of external conduct—it invaded the secret world of the heart, and St. Paul knew he could not bear that test.

Let us suppose, then, that education, art, culture, can produce this external propriety. Can it pass inward and subdue the very desires of the heart to goodness? You know it cannot, and therefore it is powerless to do the one final and necessary thing. God can never be satisfied with external correctness alone. He loves truth in the secret soul, and can never rest till the very heart is changed within us.

Time, culture, change of occupation or of scene—

all these are things, and St. Paul places his hope not in a thing, but in a person. He does not say, *What* shall deliver me? but *Who*? — and the difference between these two short words pierces to the very heart of the whole subject. It is one thing to rely on a thing, quite another to rely on a person. This goes far deeper into our nature, for we are persons, and when personality touches personality springs of life may flow which mere things can never reach.

But the question remains—What person? Often a man resolves to be his own saviour. We let evil, whether obvious or of the spirit, sweep us on for a time, until in a desperate recoil of misery we set the teeth, and clench the hands, and harden ourselves with vows: yes, we will be men at last and the tyrant weakness shall die. But the tyrant bides his time. In an hour the whole struggle breaks down, and we are only the weaker for another failure. The reason is plain enough. The person who is to deliver us is the same who is to be delivered. The very weakness against which he fights is the weakness which makes the fighting useless.

Then comes the experiment of trying what others can do. Take away undesirable companions, set a man in the midst of good people, try even marriage, and all may yet be well. 'Marry the wind,' says the proverb, 'and you will settle it.' And so the good-for-nothing is married to some good woman. Home, it is thought, the innocent prattle of children, the responsibilities of a family, will steady the unsteadiest.

You know how disastrously it sometimes ends—the weak, sinful, selfish creature breaks through every bond of love and duty and drags the innocent victims of the experiment into untold miseries. But say that it has a certain success—the man is reclaimed from external ruin. Do we not know how often such an one merely makes his family the nucleus of a new selfishness of worldly ambition, of moral unscrupulousness? There is no final freedom of the soul from evil, only the reforming of the evil, the taking of a new form.

Do you not see how we are driven to the one Person Who can really give deliverance? We have gone down one road after another, only to find that each ended in a moral *cul-de-sac*—a no-thoroughfare. We try things, but things are dead, and what we need is 'life, and life more abundant.' We try persons—ourselves and others; but, alas! we are all working within the circle of our own weakness and bondage.

All the talk about God being unnecessary, Christ unnecessary, is based on ignorance of what man is. He is a prisoner within the body of this death, powerless of himself to break through his prison-house into the world of freedom. It is the very soul of the Gospel that in Jesus Christ God Himself comes in all His wisdom, love, power, goodness, to deliver us. I do not believe it is possible for any man humbly and honestly to place himself with all his sins, penitently, in Christ's hands without being able to say at last, with St. Paul, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,' as he walks

forth in the freedom wherewith He has made him free.

Therefore, let us give up foolish and weakening experiments. You remember the words of Henry Vaughan :

> ' Leave then thy foolish ranges ;
> For none can thee secure,
> But One, Who never changes,
> Thy God, thy Life, thy Cure.'

Nothing delivers from sin and death but the power of One Who has conquered both. No mere thing can do it—no lapse of years or change of place or circumstances ; and no person can do it who is himself within the fatal circle. The Gospel *is* the Gospel just because it tells of One Who stands outside the circle, Who passed through it unharmed, and therefore brings to those within it the very power of an endless life. Does this sound vague and mysterious ? Then make it real, true, living, in your own experience : it needs nothing but the surrender of childlike trust to let the power from on high flow in—not to reform, but to regenerate the very fountains of the secret soul. But we can only get true faith in Him by trying to live like Him ; for it is written, ' If any man is willing to do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine.'

Beauty and Righteousness—The Children of Mystery

'Clouds and darkness are round about him.'
—PSALM xcvii. 2.

ONE of the most common objections to the Christian religion is that it overflows with mysteries. Its very phraseology is mysterious—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Spirit, Conversion, Regeneration, Atonement, Resurrection. 'Speak to us,' many say, 'in the simple, plain, familiar language of daily life; tell us of things that belong to the world of universal experience, and we will listen. But we will have nothing to do with this speaking in strange tongues of what lies beyond the frontiers of daily existence.' And it is not merely 'the man in the street' who speaks thus: philosophers and scientists are often equally impatient of 'clouds and darkness,' and demand a religion free of the mysterious—capable of being understood through and through in the cold, clear light of human reason.

This demand is perhaps natural, but it is perfectly fair for a Christian preacher to reply, 'I undertake to divest religion of the clouds and darkness, if you undertake to do the same with the common world, as you call it, and the men who live in it. Tell me

what exactly this natural world is : why it is natural —what natural means—whence nature comes—of what atoms it is composed—what the atoms are—and to what it is all working. Tell me what you yourself are—whence you came, whither you go, what is birth, what death, what that reason is which you set up as final judge of the universe and its Maker ; nay, what that *I* is, and *me*, the reality of which you assume but cannot prove. When you divest these familiar things of all mystery it will be time to demand that the preacher of religion sweep away all clouds and darkness from the infinite and eternal God, and make Him comprehensible to the reason that cannot comprehend itself. Is it not time that thinking men got beyond this childish demand, and learned to accept mystery in religion as in everything else ?

But to say that mystery is inevitable is a truism, and not an inspiring one. This inevitable mystery is not simply something to be borne as best we can ; it is one of the greatest blessings of human life. It forces us into movement and progress. Without it the soul would stagnate like a pool, instead of heaving like a sea. It tests our whole nature : it is the mother and nurse of beauty, of foresight, of struggle, of righteousness itself. If it were possible to strip away all mystery, and lay God and man and the universe cloudless and shadowless under the naked and omniscient reason, there would disappear along with the mystery that which made the movement and interest and progress of man's life—its loveliness and joy, and even its

moral worth. These are strong statements which I now hope to justify by an appeal to universal experience.

Let me begin by an illustration which belongs to the substance of the subject. I once sailed up the West Highlands, and had not gone far when the cloudless weather broke. At first I thought myself unfortunate. What pleasure could I expect from the clouds and darkness, the rain and flying mist? But never was any voyager more happily disappointed. The very clouds and darkness became the chief pleasure of the journey. It is impossible to tell the endless, ever-changing beauty of the clouds, the mists, the shadows on sea and land; the wonders, changes, surprises; the numberless gradations of colours which the moisture-charged atmosphere gave to the mountains, from the blackest purple on to the faintest pearly grey in the far distance; the sunsets breaking like a fireball of mist through the mist, and then swallowed up in it to break through in some new glory. And through it all the sense of some infinite mystery—something seeking to express itself, to break through and mingle with man's life.

The clouds and the darkness had done it. I felt with Browning, 'nothing ever will surprise me more.' I had seen the loveliest landscapes in other lands under what Shelley calls 'a roof of blue Ionian weather,' but they never touched me with the joy of beauty and mystery as did those cloud-swept seas and skies and mountains. It is more than an illustration—it is a fragment of the universal

mystery which is the joy and loveliness of this our life.

Turn even to science and philosophy. What is it but the endless mystery of nature and human nature which has created both, and compelled the human intellect to the task of its own development? Think of the mere savage mind alone with itself and the universe: what is its prevailing feeling? Mystery, clouds and darkness. And the mystery stings and goads even it into guesses at the meaning. And guessing continues age after age, and theory displaces theory; and in the long, laborious process the intellect grows, is sharpened, observes, experiments, reflects on itself and the world, until the scientific and philosophic mind is evolved—and the mother of the great evolution is mystery, which never allowed the human intellect to fold its wings and sink into the low contentment of ignorance.

And, again, what is art but just that endless effort of the human heart to capture the elusive and beautiful mystery of the all of things in a net, sometimes of words, as in poetry, sometimes of sound, as in music; sometimes of form and colour, as in painting? The highest poetry is always haunted with this mystery: its very words suggest things 'that break through language and escape' —the dim and lovely soul of being that refuses to be captured in articulate speech.

And then comes the *in*articulate speech of music —the human soul flinging itself out, beyond all words, upon the clouds and darkness; the vague, formless emotions that can find no speech save

beautiful sound, feeling dimly after the mystery of life and the world. And no music holds the human soul for long that has not something of this mystery —of clouds and darkness, of the winds and the waves that for ever seek and never find.

And is any painting immortal that has not caught at least a hint of a mysterious something—either in the natural world, or in the human soul, or in a region which 'eye hath not seen'? Yes, Art in every high form is born of mystery, and everything that lifts the imagination into a noble joy is the child of the clouds and the darkness.

You may think this is dwelling too long on things which scarcely belong to the region of religion. I think they are nearer that region than we generally suppose; but, even if they are not, it is always helpful to trace how the same principle runs through all things from lowest to highest. If we find that in things we call secular—delight, beauty, progress of mind and emotion—all spring from mystery, it must prepare us to find the same power of it working in the loftier region of morality and religion. There it creates forethought, patience, duty, righteousness, humbleness, trust, and the crown of all virtues, love.

Take the uncertainty of the future: what an endless blessing that is! It is not only that our ignorance frees us from the torment of watching the approach of calamities—it is much more than that; it gives us the power of *work* and of putting our *trust* in an Infinite Wisdom to whom the future is clear: and without these two things, work and trust, no high and worthy human life is ever evolved.

This is why it is difficult for the very rich to enter the Kingdom—their wealth secures them against some of the most imperious uncertainties of the future. There is no necessity for work, and they often degenerate ; there is no urgent need to trust God, for men who trust in riches. The poor man, hanging at every moment on an uncertain future, has at least a better chance of receiving the great discipline of work and faith.

Or turn to the great moral problem of this world. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him : righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.' But is this last statement true? It is not obviously true—not so obviously, not so utterly beyond all doubt, that men are not tempted to live as if it were *not* true. The mystery of iniquity is very ancient—as old as Job and the Psalmist Asaph. Justice and judgment are themselves wrapt in clouds and darkness. Wickedness often seems to walk through this world conquering and to conquer, trampling the righteous to the ground ; and God keeps silence and makes no sign.

This is the ancient mystery in which the race of man walks as in clouds and darkness—a mystery of iniquity and a mystery of righteousness. But without it moral character could not be tried and tested. If every sin brought an immediate stroke of judgment, it would be madness to sin—none would do so save by accident, as one puts one's hand in the fire. And so the very justice of God suspends its action that the soul of man may be free to make its choice of good or evil. Without the

mystery of the Divine justice—this appearance of uncertainty in its judgments—there could not exist that freedom necessary for the soul's probation. And, therefore, moral character, the formation of a love of righteousness apart from fear of consequences, is one direct result of this mystery of Divine judgment. And this is at least equally true of the mystery which surrounds the future world—its judgments, and even its existence. For if we knew definitely that there was a future life, and that in it justice would infallibly be done, there could be no such thing as choosing the right for its own sake with no certainty of reward, no greatness of soul in facing death for some high cause. There is nothing noble to be won without taking risks—all life is founded on this principle. The 'fearful' may not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Death must be a leap in the dark, otherwise courage is impossible. You remember the words in 'The Ring and the Book,' true and noble, though put in the mouth of Guido :

> 'You never know what life means till you die :
> Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes life live,
> Gives it whatever the significance.
> For see, . . .
> Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
> A possibility of nobleness
> In man, prevented daring any more ?
> What 's love, what 's faith without a worst to dread ?
> Lack-lustre jewelry ! but faith and love
> With death behind them bidding do or die—
> Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born ! '

And now we come to the great subject of Theology —the mystery of God's own being, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ. For, revealed even so, it is still a mystery. Trinity, Incarnation, Spirit, Conversion, Regeneration, Atonement, Resurrection —we use the words, but none knows one thousandth part of what they mean. Every generation of Christians has gazed, wondered, guessed, constructed its little theory, and, behold, it is a mystery still.

Yes, and a blessed one ; for the very mystery gives us our one chance of truly knowing. Imagine the greatness of our loss if all mystery in theology were stript away and an infallible guide given who would solve every problem, save us the labour of thinking for ourselves, and tell us exactly what to believe. It is what has actually been attempted in certain sections of the Christian Church, which undertake to settle infallibly all questions of theology and to leave nothing in doubt. And the result is that the majority of laymen take no interest whatsoever in theology, which they regard as belonging to the clergy exclusively. But faith tends to become a mere assent of the mind to what another says, when we forget that in heavenly as in earthly wisdom 'this sore travail' of thinking for ourselves is, to quote Ecclesiastes, given by God 'to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.'

That degradation of faith is certainly not what God meant. He never meant our souls to be thus saved from the play of mystery around them—to be defrauded of the great education that mystery gives.

For what is faith? Not merely assent to what another says: it is the trust of a child towards its father. The very mystery of the father gives the child's trust a sphere in which to grow. The little child cannot fathom its father's thought, character, motives, work, but the child's faith is not thereby perplexed or dismayed. The father lifts its helplessness into his arms, folds it to his breast, and the child's heart is filled with happy, trustful peace.

So is it with the Father Eternal. Almost infinite spaces of Being lie beyond our present knowledge, but one central truth nothing but trust can teach —that He is the Father, that His name is Love. And knowing that, the clouds and darkness have no terrors for us. The Eternal Love folds us in; underneath are the everlasting arms; and we know that whatever part of the mystery can be revealed to us will be revealed through that childlike faith preparing our souls for it. And thus the mystery of God will remain for ever and ever, because no mere creature can ever know all that God is. Yet for ever and for ever our faith will penetrate into that bright mystery—knowing more and more; and the more we know, rejoicing the more that we can never exhaust the knowledge. The knowledge of God is eternal life, just because it is a knowledge which never can come to an end, a point beyond which nothing remains to be known. Therefore let us rejoice greatly that clouds and darkness are round about Him. Let us see in that mystery the Divine means by which our souls are drawn out into

faith, hope, love; let us wait and watch and work quietly and joyfully until the day break and these shadows flee away, and the great mystery deepens into a brighter glory and a more blessed vision.

The Divine Background

'Be still, and know that I am God.'—PSALM xlvi. 10.

WHEN the Psalmist spoke these words, Jerusalem was besieged by some enemy—probably the Assyrians under Sennacherib; and his meaning is that ultimate national safety comes, not from the might of armies, but from God Himself: 'Be still, and know that I am God.'

But we may easily apply this text to the life of the individual. The general idea is that God is the background of our life, its great foundation and sub-structure, which we are constantly forgetting or ignoring. When any danger comes on us—when our life is assailed by some enemy as Jerusalem by the Assyrians—we are thrown into a panic, we devise ways and means of driving off the foe: when our one wisdom would be to obey this command, 'Be still, and know that I am God'—to pierce beneath the poor noisy surface of ourselves until we reach the Unseen Foundation of the whole universe.

Suppose that some great danger has come upon us, like the Assyrians round Jerusalem, something which throws the city of the soul into a panic and breaks down the common routine of our life—the breakage of bodily health or the failure of worldly

prosperities ; the ingratitude or treachery of friends or the scattering of our home by death or worse. They are the familiar enemies that may sweep down on any one of us at any moment. They throw the soul into a panic ; and all its life and power depend on how we meet such dangers. We may say, 'Better end it all in a moment and have done with a mad world where such things are possible.' Or we may live on by drugging ourselves into forgetfulness by some distraction or dissipation ; or we may trust to time, or change of scene, to blot out the bitter memory ; or we may doggedly set our teeth and work to repair the damage, or, at least, to bear as best we can.

All these methods come from the circle of ourselves. Suppose, now, we could in very truth make our escape into God—could cease dashing ourselves against the bars of our own poor powers and resources—could realise that God is the infinite and eternal background of our sorrow and human weakness. There He is, as constant, as faithful, as sure, as the great elemental forces and powers of Nature. It is surely much to know that such a God *is*, that *our* whole being rests on this foundation of the very Being of God. And this gives the certainty that our danger and sorrow is not a mere chance and accident. I do not say that He ordains just this or that adversity ; but He certainly allows the possibility of it. That takes away the bitter feeling that we are the sport of chance—mere foam that breaks and flies before every wandering wind. For if God ordain such possibilities of pain, it must

be because just such pain gives the soul a chance which nothing else can give.

For it gives us the opportunity of knowing our own weakness, the insufficiency of all earthly things —of casting ourselves upon an Eternal Power behind all human infirmity, of finding an Eternal Helper behind all human sorrow and need. And then He folds the weak, bruised, and broken life in with His own personal presence. He gives it strange revelations of Himself which we could never otherwise have seen. There is no escape like this, none which so quiets and satisfies the soul, none which so distils from the adversities of this mortal life the sweetness and strength for which God ordained them.

If, then, any loss or sorrow befall you, 'Be still, and know that He is God.' Learn that God is both the background and the foundation of your frail life ; that this grief has not come on you by a wandering chance, but by His ordaining ; that He ordains nothing useless or loveless. Then, indeed, the soul can be still, knowing that even grief is but the minister of such a God.

Turn to another of the enemies that assail our life. Alas ! was ever Jerusalem more closely invested with Assyrian hosts than we are with the crowd of temptations and sins ? When we begin to realise the greatness of the army, the subtlety of their wiles, the persistency of their attacks, which of us has not a thousand regrets for the past, a thousand fears for the future, and for the present an equal number of despairs ?

Some give up in despair the problem of driving off this inveterate enemy. Some hedge themselves in with little rules and observances. Others fear the consequences of sin, here or hereafter. A few turn to their fellow-men, reinforcing the weakness of their wills by some human goodness.

Now, all of these are not wrong ; but imagine that we could still the tumult caused by sin and truly turn to God. What can He do for the city of our souls thus besieged by its worst enemies? In the first place, what Nature is to physical diseases, God is to diseases of the soul. The best service a physician can render is to put his patient into right relations with Nature, and let Nature apply to him her healing power, on which the physician relies—and which is the background, as it were, of all his labours. Now, just such a presupposition and background for diseases of the soul is God—the natural healing power. The one hope for any sinful man is to be set in right relations with Him. Otherwise, the cure of sin is absolutely hopeless. There is no great fountain of natural healing power from which we can draw, except God. He is, like Nature, the great fountain of life, health, strength, out of which must come clear water for the cleansing and healing of all wounds, moral and physical. This is His very nature as God, if we may say so. For this reason He created a race like ours with perfect knowledge that we would sin, because He also knew that He had in His own being an infinite capacity of healing and repair. 'I have made, and I will bear'—He

will carry the burden of His creation, because He is the Creator.

Hence the reasonableness of turning to Him no matter what our sins may be: 'Be still, and know that I am God—have no fear; My healing power cannot fail; there is no disease so inveterate that it will not yield to Me.' How still we would grow if only we could believe this; how the clamours of our sins and temptations would quiet themselves! God's healing, life-giving power is the natural and therefore necessary background of a sinful world.

All this is equally true of another danger and trial of our souls—the breakdown of our faith in God and religion. What a tumult and clamour of voices are around us, disputing, questioning everything! Small wonder if many know not what to believe. One man smiles bitterly and flings the faith of his boyhood to the winds. Another refuses to think, yields intellect and soul to some one who claims to have authority.

And now suppose that across all this clamour of doubt and perplexity we could hear a voice say, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Would it not be something, to begin with, just to quiet the doubtful, discordant voices? Believe me, any of you who are in the heart of this clamour of doubt and perplexity, your first chance of anything sure is to bid the Babel be silent—to refuse to listen to it longer. It is because your ears are so filled with such noises that you cannot hear God. Be still, and you will have at least a chance of knowing that He *is*.

Then remember that behind all this clamour there must exist Truth itself—the eternal reality of this entire universe. How can there be a moment's doubt of that? Why are our minds consumed with a hunger and thirst for certainty? Simply because we know by instinct that certainty and truth do exist—if not, why search for them? Now that Truth is God. He is the presupposition of doubt. We could not doubt the truth unless there were truth to doubt. Doubt rises because we entangle our minds in the second causes of things; in verbal statements of creeds; in words whose meaning we see through a glass darkly; in churches, institutions, and rites which often misrepresent God Himself. The only real escape is to be still from all of them—to give free play to the instinct within you which says, 'Truth is not here, but it must be somewhere.' How often it has happened that when a man resolutely stills the warring voices around him, for the first time he hears God's voice, and knows Him for the one sure, absolute, eternal Truth of all this world!

> 'Heartily know
> When half-gods go,
> The gods arrive.'

Yes, when the half-gods of our own speculations and the doubts and questionings of our fellows go, then God arrives, and we no more doubt Him than we doubt our own existence—nay, less, for we know our existence hangs solely upon His.

I have spoken of God as the natural background of all our weaknesses—our sorrows, our sins, our

doubts. Be quite sure it is so—you have only to quiet the loud voices of these to know that this is so. There God stands for ever: the consolation of sorrow—the healer of sin—the Truth whose existence doubt proves by its own.

But in all this do we not take up a somewhat unworthy attitude toward God? It is as if we would do without Him if only we could and dared. We use him as a harbour which we would never enter but for some storm. Is that all that God is? Is He background for our sorrow—for our sin—for our doubt—and not also for our joy? Believe me, it is not in sorrow, or sin, or doubt alone that God needs to say to us, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' The full and joyous flood-tide of life hides Him more effectually sometimes than any of these. Too often health, strength, the happiness of home, the smoothness of our unbroken prosperity, the brightness of the sunshine, hinder our knowing that He is. We cannot hear Him for the noise of the wheels of our business and pleasure; the music of the voices of wife and child and friend; the singing of birds in the garden enclosed which we have made for ourselves. Have we not a fear deep down, unacknowledged, unexpressed, that if we carried these joys of our life to Him they would straightway cease to be joys, a cloud would fall upon our sunshine? To adapt the words of O'Shaughnessy, we feel that:

> 'His passing touch is death to all,
> His passing look is blight;
> He makes the white rose petals fall,
> And turns the red rose white.'

Or else we say with Francis Thompson :

> ' Though I knew His love Who followèd,
> Yet was I sore adread
> Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.'

How terribly we darken Him Who is the golden background of all human joy ! Nay, rather the golden sunlight which glows round us and makes all our joys open up into their bright, consummate flower. Why should we ever dream that any right joy of life could ever be less a joy because it is brought to Him Who is the Eternal Happiness ? It is as if the flower shrank from the sunshine, the bird from its native air. You find joy in your daily work : will you find less if you think of it as part of the work of Him Who worketh hitherto ? You find joy in the beauty of this world—its music, lights, shadows, surprises : will it be dimmed if you think of it as flowing from the Eternal and Uncreated Loveliness ? You find it in human love, in fatherhood : how should the joy ever grow less because you feel it to be part of the Eternal Fatherhood and Love ? Or if earthly happiness seems to fail you, remember those other words of Francis Thompson :

> ' All which I took from thee I did but take,
> Not for thy harms,
> But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.'

' Be still, and know that I am God '—not merely as a refuge from sorrow, sin, and doubt, but as the sunshine and blessedness of your life and heart and soul. The Bible is full of this idea of joy :

'There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God'; 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures'; 'In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.' My friends, quiet the voices, not of joy, but of selfish joy; for then you will know Him Whose gladness glows and burns through every heart that loves what He loves.

Experience—the Mother of Faith

'But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'—2 PETER iii. 18.

'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.'—JOHN xiii. 7.

I WISH this morning to try to show how our knowledge of Christ stands related to our growing experience of life, so that life becomes the key to that knowledge. Every preacher knows that the effectiveness of his words depends not only upon their truth, but also upon the stage of life's experience his hearers have reached. With some every true word is felt to be true; some great experience of life illuminates and interprets it; and in that light of life words and deeds of Jesus, for years scarcely understood, grow clear, living, real. For others the same words and deeds have no significance. No experience of life acts as their interpreter. These hearers are like the first disciples, like Peter and James and John when they stood bewildered before some mysterious word, some perplexing act of their Master. They had not yet lived into the illuminating experience of life corresponding to them. But their life went on—experience widened—they were carried on into new circumstances; and behold, one by one the mysterious words and acts and sufferings yielded their secret.

And so to-day as then. We may think we know Jesus through theory and doctrine. It is not knowledge. Knowledge comes only through life. And there is something strange and beautiful in the way in which the knowledge of Christ deepens with the deepening experiences of life.

Take a very simple example of this. Jesus says : 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' The words in themselves are like music to the ear ; but you would scarcely expect them to be understood by a young man brimming over with vitality and courage, eager to measure his strength against life and the world. Twenty years hence he may hear them with different ears, when his early hopes are vanished like morning cloud, his heart's affections, it may be, wounded and torn, his very soul is disappointed with itself.

Let us take another more difficult example—the question of the Divinity of Christ. In whom must we trust for salvation—a mere man like ourselves, or a God? We must live for some time before we feel how momentous this is. To youth it is usually an academic question to be debated with the mind, not a matter of life or death, and this no matter which side the young mind takes. One thinks the Humanity is enough—it seems to bring Christianity nearer. Another takes the orthodox view of His Divinity, but only as an orthodoxy, an opinion second-hand from others.

For a youth has not sufficient experience of what life is, to feel the question of what Jesus is as vital

for him. But the passage of the years may give it a strange and terrible vitality. A man finds within himself a dreadful life and strength of evil; when he would do good, evil is present with him; the new circumstances into which life is ever bringing him seem only to turn it into new forms; do what he will he cannot beat it down and conquer it. Then he finds that he is not alone in this experience. The whole world is full of the same vitality of evil—the wreck and ruin of it darkens the very sunshine.

And then, if he has any moral and spiritual earnestness at all, the question of what Jesus Christ is becomes strangely urgent. Is He simply a man, Himself inside this fatal circle of sin? If so, then what hope is there that He will ever escape from it, or open a path of escape for others? The experience of life forces many a man to ask, 'What hope is there for the redemption of a world like this until God Himself take it in hand, enter into it, and conquer its evil by His own goodness?' It is the question Tennyson answers in his old age, out of long experience of life and the world:

> 'Ere earth reach her heavenly best, a God must mingle with the game.'

He saw no hope for the world in a mere human Saviour. And I believe this is what compels many a man to hold fast the Divinity of Jesus Christ—not argument, not philosophy or creed, not even His own claims, but life's experience. The claims themselves become real to many only in the fierce

light which that experience casts on the necessity of a God to redeem a world like this.

Again, ask yourselves what is it that makes the Atonement a great and living reality in a human soul? Once more I answer—the experience of life. In youth we may indeed hold it as a doctrine ; we may even formulate theories which we believe that we believe in, of the how and the why. Or we may dismiss it as superstition. In one sense it matters little which we do ; because the Atonement cannot become a living power to us until we have lived long enough to see that it is part of life itself—that love always substitutes itself, as far as it can, for others. Life is full of this substitution—this vicarious suffering ; and when we have lived long enough to see this and to practise it, then the vicarious suffering of God in Christ becomes not only credible, but, if one may dare to say so, the Divinest, most beautiful thing in God. He could not be God if He were able to stand aside and abandon to destruction the world He had created.

A lady who worked much among working men writes that it was this relation of the Atonement to the facts of life which she found of greatest power to move and convert. 'I troubled them with no theories, I simply gave them the facts ; and I illustrated these facts, not by foolish figments about a good little boy bearing the punishment of a bad little boy, or an impossible monarch who caused himself to be flogged in the stead of his rebellious soldiers, but by all the most sweet and solemn facts of life. For whatever difficulties may be felt

about the Atonement, the *fact* of it is woven into the very warp and woof of human life. Vicarious suffering meets us, pleading with pierced hands, at every turn. We could not enter into life but by the anguish of the one who loves us best. . . . *Our* sin and sorrow is for ever pressing on the hearts of those who love us, and becoming their shame and pain. Love crowned with our thorns is for ever atoning for us, putting away our selfishness, and making us "at one" with our better selves. All human life is made up of fragments of the true Cross; and all things lead up to Him Who loves us with more than a mother's love, suffered for us more than a mother's pangs, bears with us with more than a mother's patience. And,' she adds, 'however men may dispute over the theory, the Atonement did become a great fact in our midst. Beneath the power of the Cross of Christianity, I have seen four hundred rough, world-hardened, reckless men weeping and sobbing over their sins. I have seen, Sunday after Sunday, bad men turned into good by it, men who were drunkards, profligates, blasphemers, fighters, gamblers, turned into good, devout, tender-hearted men.' (E. Hopkins.)

Now, these men had heard of the Cross and the Atonement a hundred times before, and it had left them unmoved, unchanged. Yes, because never before had it been brought into connection with their own life and experience—never before had they seen that the vicarious suffering of Christ is part of the vicarious suffering that pervades all life. When they saw it, the Cross to which they

had been quite indifferent suddenly glowed and burned with a new and beautiful fire of Divine love.

Again, I do not think the young usually attach much meaning to the Resurrection—they have not lived long enough to understand how welcome it can be to the human heart. I have heard young men object to hymns that spoke of death and heaven, and to Christianity in general because it seemed to them to make more of another world than of this.

To such the whole story of the Resurrection and Ascension, and Christianity's words about a world to come, must be more or less distasteful. But let life's sad experiences of disease, death, and the last parting gather round the heart—let the man who in his youth waved lightly aside the future world stand looking into its darkness as one after another whom his soul loved passes into its mystery : and it may then happen that the story of the Resurrection and Christ's words about the Father's house will be as water to the thirsty soul. In the light of life's experience those things in Christianity which may have seemed to dwarf and dishonour earth, and blight the very sunlight, now shine as stars of hope in the great darkness surrounding this little life.

One of our poets writes four sonnets telling how he gave up faith in the Resurrection and took refuge in the thought that at death our personal life slips back into the universe from which it came. For a time he was satisfied, but life and its experi-

ences came to break his poor contentment. His child died, and love cried out for personal immortality. He tells how, when his child, 'his one girl-babe,' 'his dream and his desire,' lay dead, his wife bade him be comforted. 'She is with Christ.'

> 'I laughed in my despair.
> With Christ! O God! and where is Christ, and where
> My poor dead babe? And where the countless dead?

Yes—'where the countless dead?'—and among them the poor dead babe, and where ourselves some day? These are the questions which life's experience puts to us, and it is then, if ever, that the Resurrection of Jesus and all His words of an eternal life shine as never before with the light of an immortal hope. No mere record of the Gospels could kindle that hope, no arguments of reason, no dogma of the creeds.

For Christianity and life correspond. As bread to hunger, air to the lungs, light to the eye, is Christ to the human soul. The too common idea is that Christ and Christianity are alien to human nature. It is not so. The experience of life is the proof of their truth, their reasonableness, their necessity to the heart and spirit of man.

There is, I am sure, one thought in all our minds this morning, and you will expect me to say a few words about our dead King. As you know, he passed away suddenly—so suddenly that the nation scarcely realised that he was ill before all was over; and the grief for him is as wide as the great Empire

over which he reigned. The sympathy of all our people, and indeed we may say of all foreign lands as well, goes out to the Queen and the Royal Family in their sorrow. We can only pray that God may comfort them as He alone can.

You will not expect me to say much—the fewer and simpler the words the better. There is, I think, something pathetic in the shortness of the King's reign, in contrast with that of his mother. He was almost an old man before he reached the throne. As Prince of Wales he relieved his mother of many public duties, performed for many years with a tact and an affability which made him popular with all classes. This, along with foreign travel and great knowledge of men and affairs, made him undoubtedly the wisest and most statesmanlike king in Europe. His tact as a diplomatist is being universally commented on, but we must remember that this diplomatic tact might easily have been used for dangerous ends. It was King Edward's ambition to use it for the honourable end of securing the peace of the world. He was at heart an English gentleman, a true lover of his country, and he saw clearly that all the best interests of the Empire lay in the direction of peace. That is the true glory of his reign—he sought peace and ensued it; and the country does not yet know fully what it owes to him in the settlement and consolidation of its foreign relations. It is one of the greatest services a king can render to his people, to surround them with a shield of peace inside of which they can pursue their work and pleasures with a quiet mind.

For this we owe our dead king our deepest gratitude; and we can pray no better prayer for his son than that by Divine grace and help he may so walk in the footsteps of his father as to share with him that honourable title of 'Peacemaker' which all men feel to be his due.

'The Best is yet to Be'

'Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.'—JOHN ii. 10.

THESE words were originally spoken with no very serious meaning. The ruler of the feast probably only meant to compliment his friend the bridegroom on having given the company a pleasant surprise. But many a true word is spoken in jest. The ruler did not know that he was expressing one of the greatest truths—that while the world's way is to give its best wine first and afterwards that which is worse, Christ's method invariably keeps the good wine till the end. In all experience apart from Christ there is a more or less gradual lowering of the quality and the joy of life. It is only in Him that life and joy grow continually from good to better, and from better on to best.

The wine of life seems very good to the prodigal when he starts out from his father's house—the new wine of liberty, of escape from restraints, of wild companionships, of forbidden pleasure, of the joy and marvel of a novel world! At the beginning, undoubtedly, the good wine is set forth: it seems so natural to give free play to the desires and instincts within the breast, instead of allowing

them to beat and break their wings within an iron cage of self-restraint.

'How good is man's life, the mere living, how fit to employ
All the heart, and the soul, and the senses for ever in joy!'

And the good wine lasts for a time: all goes merry as a marriage bell. But the time comes 'when men have well drunk,' when the palate is no longer so keen, when a worse and still worse wine has to be substituted—coarser and still coarser pleasures—and at last nothing is left but the lees and dregs, jaded soul and jaded senses, from which the power of enjoyment has died out.

'Yes,' says a prudent man of the world, 'but why was he so foolish as to burn out life's candle in this mad way? There is a prudence and decency to be observed even in pleasure.'

Let us turn, then, to the prudent man of the world. Let us admit that the worse wine comes to him in quite another way than to the reckless prodigal—but it does come. The world has given him its best wine. He is a successful man—he has houses and lands, servants to run at his bidding, a secure position among his fellow-worldlings. I ask you, does there never fall upon the sunlight and prosperity of such an one a strange shadow of threatening disaster, of some dread reversal of fortune, if not here, elsewhere—the sense, moreover, that all this is not the thing for which he was made? Was it for this worldly comfort and poor contentment that God made a being with thought which

can wander through eternity, and soul which can be haunted by a world unseen? Some day all this will be felt by every worldly man. He will know himself incomplete, unfulfilled. He will feel the weary, unsatisfied thirst which must consume every man made for God Who chooses the world instead.

And now, suppose we choose Christ and the wine of life He can give us. What is choosing Christ but simply choosing the one right way of living—choosing our true self, and the power which will develop it and bring out of it all its faculties of good?

Sometimes, it is true, the wine of this Christ-life may seem bitter to the taste, but that is because our taste is perverted. We are asked to give up old habits of evil, to separate ourselves from many worldly things, to deny ourselves for the sake of Christ and of our fellows—in some real sense to bear the Cross our Master bore. It is neither easy nor pleasant to do this at first. Self-sacrifice is a bitter wine to most of us.

But I appeal to any of you who have loyally and constantly striven to take up your cross and follow Christ, did not the bitter grow sweet?—did not the very pain open up into the flower of joy and peace? Did there not come to you the feeling that this at last was your true nature manifesting itself, height beyond height, depth beyond depth? Did not the wine of life and joy become ever purer, clearer, with a purity and clearness of which you did not dream at the beginning? The reason is simple enough: Christ draws forth our true

nature ; and as our true nature casts off more and more the old false nature, the pain and struggle pass away. The good wine is kept to the end.

Hitherto I have spoken only of the contrast between sin and worldliness on the one hand, and Christ on the other. Nevertheless, our text is true of many things neither sinful nor worldly in themselves.

Take what this marriage at Cana suggests, the natural relationships of life in the home and family. It is only too possible to enter on those relationships in a spirit and temper which will turn them soon enough into a very poor and sour wine indeed. At first it seems good. The joy of heart mingling with heart, life with life, exhilarates like noble wine. Yet often the first passion and delight gradually die out, the married life becomes a weary monotony, a fetter on the wrist, and all is dull depression. How has the fine gold become dim, and the wine mixed with water? The only answer is that such a marriage was a mere selfishness. It had nothing in it worthy of the Divine name of love. The glamour wore away—the weary selfishness remained. For our human affections can remain pure and strong, only in the glow of our love for the Divine :

> 'I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
> Loved I not Honour more.'

Imagine, now, that it had been a marriage in Christ and in His spirit. His spirit is love—not as a fever of the senses, or as a claim on the service

of others, but love which gives itself away, which delights to serve, which 'suffereth long, and is kind . . . seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked,' 'hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Imagine a home in which this spirit of love and mutual helpfulness prevailed: surely the best wine would be given, not at the beginning, but at the end? Every day would add new tendernesses to be remembered in years to come, associations of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, lived through together: until at last the common things of daily life became a rich and most precious wine of love's own pressing. But this best wine cannot come at the beginning—it is the last fruit of the love of Christ working in the home and family.

Or take the way in which we lay hold of that truth which we call our creed. There is a way of gaining and holding our creed which gives good wine at the beginning, and very poor wine at the end. It is when we accept it merely or chiefly on the authority of others, on second-hand or hearsay evidence. It seems very good wine at first. It is very easy to accept; it never troubles us with doubts and difficulties. But years pass, and this easy, comfortable creed becomes in many ways worse than useless. It becomes a lumber of the mind, an excrescence and parasite upon the soul, a nucleus round which frequently gather narrowness, prejudice, bitterness, and uncharity. This is the worse wine which is given by a creed falsely gained and falsely held.

But there is another way of gaining. It is Christ's

own way—the way He always strove to teach His disciples. It is the way of living with Himself, loving Him, hearing His words, obeying them, and by this great process of experience working out our creed through life. It is worth the while of any man, of even the agnostic, to try this. Whether we believe in Christ as the veritable Son of God or not, we must all know that if every individual followed His example this world would be a very different place. Let the man who struggles vainly for faith try to follow in Christ's footsteps, and all these things, even intellectual faith, will be added unto him.

It was not an easy task at first. Peter, James, John, and the others had many a difficulty, doubt and struggle. But the best wine did come at last, the wine of perfect faith in their Master, of perfect love and loyalty. They had no doubt at last of His Divine power, wisdom, goodness. And their faith was full of life, because drawn from life. When Peter spoke of faith in Christ, it was no mere dead logical creed picked up at second-hand of which he thought. It was a thing filled with living memories and experiences—golden words by the sea or on the mountain, his Master's rebukes, his first missionary experiment, his denial in the High Priest's house, his forgiveness in the early morning by the lake-side, his meeting with his risen Lord. And thus it was that Christ gave him the best wine at the end—the best wine of a creed which, because it grew from life, could stand life's stress and strain.

Nor is it given yet otherwise. This best wine of faith in Christ cannot come at the beginning of any man's Christian life—just because it is the beginning. The man has not lived his way into it yet—it is a matter of years to do that. This is not to say that a sudden wonderful change may not come—the miracle which some call conversion. But this itself often comes after long conscious or even subconscious striving, sometimes in one who imagines he is actually hostile to religion. And if the conversion be real, the faith of such an one will grow stronger as the years pass away. Who can doubt that, even to such an one as he

> 'who at Damascus
> Sawest the splendour, answeredst the Voice,'

the best wine was given last?

If any man says, 'My faith was far stronger when I was a boy,' he never had faith. Our faith should be like the house which a man builds for himself, and to which every year brings some beautiful change, as memory is added to memory, experience to experience. Here is the little core and heart of it where he lived at first. Then a wing was thrown out here, another there. In this room his children were born. Every chamber is filled with memories of both joy and sorrow; the very pictures and ornaments remind him of happy days of travel when he picked them up.

So a man's faith should grow into a larger and nobler home for his soul, every room of which is filled with the experience of his life with Christ,

knowledge of His will, obedience to His words, memory of His power to forgive, to rebuke, to comfort in sorrow. Obviously this best wine cannot come at the beginning—it is the best wine just because it comes last as the vintage of a life of love and obedience.

Further, the text applies equally to human life in general. We often hear people bewail the passing of youth as the passing of the best of life. Alas, how poorly and meanly a man must have lived if that is really true—how little of Christ he must have admitted to his soul!

There is something terrible in the thought that we are further away from God and Heaven at sixty or seventy than when we were boys and girls. That can only be true if we have lived for ourselves alone. If we had lived for others, the great and noble thoughts and emotions which only love can gather would have formed for us a noble character. The man who lives for others, as Christ did, enriches his own soul with the experiences of others, their hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, nay, their sins and struggles after holiness: all grow year by year and create within him a life infinitely richer, wider, deeper, Diviner than the life of his youth.

We are quite mistaken when we imagine that religious joy is truer in youth than in after life. It is just here that Christ most truly keeps the best wine possible to us on earth to the end, as the final fruit and vintage of this earthly existence. 'The hoary head is indeed a crown of glory' when it crowns a long life well spent. The impetuous

religion of youth is very beautiful, but there is a mellowness, a kindliness, a tolerance towards others which is given to age rather than to youth. Doubts, which seem to the youth so terribly important, die away in face of the lifelong experience of the man who has learnt, to quote the actual words of a certain soldier in the Great War, that 'it is possible to know God directly as one knows a friend.' As Browning makes Rabbi Ben Ezra say :—

> 'Grow old along with me !
> The best is yet to be,
> The last of life, for which the first was made :
> Our times are in His hand
> Who saith, " A whole I planned,
> Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all,
> nor be afraid." '

Thus Christ keeps the best wine to the end ; but remember that the end is not here. The best wine waits for us in some life beyond. After all, what is it that the best Christian attains in our poor, swift threescore years and ten? Doubtless the wine of the Christian life grows better as years pass by ; but when death comes, even the best of us have not yet tasted the pure blood of the grape, the perfect love, the perfect loyalty, the perfect obedience to the perfect Will. The best saints this world has seen, men like St. Paul and St. John, approach the borderland confessing that they have not attained nor are already perfect—and declaring that 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be.'

And just this is the Divinest thing about Christ—

that He will not give the best wine here, that He can quicken in us hopes and powers and possibilities which outleap the narrow bounds of earth, and claim heaven and eternity as their inheritance. It sets the soul in the attitude of an eternal hope, an onward movement. There are in you and me capacities which even Christ cannot draw out in one short life. There is a world where every true power of the soul will grow to a stature and strength of which we can form no conception here; and what that joy will be when we drink that best wine in the Kingdom of God, no soul of man can tell on this side of eternity. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.'

My friends, let us learn to have great hopes and expectations toward Christ. He is not one who gives His best at first, so that there remains for us only future disappointment. You know such friends. You hope much from them. Their friendship seems at first so rich, so warm, so able to draw out the best in you. Alas! they gave you their best all at once, and you quickly discover that there is nothing else in them.

It is never so with Christ. The best in Him cannot be given to us until that same best is quickened in ourselves. If we were able to receive His best at this very hour, then this very hour He would give it us. We are not able to receive it, and the whole meaning of the Christian life is that He is educating us to receive it. But it cannot

come in a moment, and we should be deeply thankful that it cannot. All that Christ can give us of truth or goodness, of faith, hope, love, and the peace and joy which come of these, is so great that neither time nor eternity can exhaust it. It is enough for us in the midst of the trials of earth to know that He Himself is the best wine, and that, from good to better and ever better, He will never cease to lead us toward Himself. Let the young live so that this best wine will be given them, and let the old remember that the soul is still young with eternity before it, and with an ever lightening horizon of hope. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.'

The Quality on which God relies

Unveiling of Memorial to our Men who fell in the Great War, 1914-19.

'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.'—Rev. ii. 10.

In the Epistles to the Seven Churches, the Apostle John has a way of referring to certain features of the various cities—geographical and historical—that he may the better bring home to his converts the religious meaning of the message Christ sends. A well-known writer says that in the city of Smyrna two things were famous, current in the speech of the citizens, and constantly referred to by its orators and writers—faithfulness and the crown. Smyrna was an ally of Rome long before the days of its imperial power, and its fidelity to that alliance was the pride of its citizens, and was repaid by Rome with great civic privileges. When St. John says to the Church in Smyrna, 'Be thou faithful unto death,' it is as if he said, 'Your city prides itself on fidelity; let the Church of Christ be as faithful as the city.' The second reference is to the crown of Smyrna. The city was praised universally for its beauty, rising to a crown of towers and battlements on the hill behind it. Its writers and orators spoke again and again of this

hill with its buildings as the crown of Smyrna, and this idea of a crown passed into the common speech of the citizens. St. John, then, says in effect: 'As your earthly city wears its crown of towers, so will Christ reward the faithfulness of His Church with a better crown, the crown of life.' It is not unlike what one of their writers says: 'It is a greater charm to wear a crown of men, than a crown of porticoes and pictures and gold.'

That is what the text meant for the Church of Smyrna, and it means the same for us to-day. We are met for the noble purpose of dedicating a memorial to men of our own church who have been faithful unto death, and by whose death we live. It is the least we can do, but it may help to remind us of how much more we ought to strive to do. Perhaps our first duty is to remember how much real heroism may be concealed in ordinary men and women. They lived among us, went out and in among their neighbours, some were artisans, clerks, workers in the ordinary ranks of life, and we never knew what they were. No halo of what we call heroism flashed from their brows. But when the hour of need struck, they were found faithful unto death. Faithful to what, or whom? To their homes, their wives and children, their country, their sense of justice? That is not our concern—enough for us that they were faithful to something they believed worthy to die for. And sometimes I wonder if we do not pity them too much. We imagine the sacrifices they made—the anguish of giving up all the natural hopes and joys of young

and opening life, the thousand ties of dear, familiar things which had grown to be part of their very being, heart of their heart. It is not for us to make little of such sacrifices, which wound the very soul. Yet we who never made the sacrifice cannot know the strange, deep, unspeakable dearness of all these things. As these young hearts marched away, turning their backs on a world of love, how infinitely dearer, more precious grew love itself, by the mere act of giving it up. Nor can any who have not experienced it know the vast wave of triumph which swept over the soul when the sacrifice was accomplished—first in the decision of the will, and then in the fulfilment of the deed. And surely in this we ought to include women who nursed and worked as well as men, and those who came back with life, though often life wounded and broken : for all must have made the sacrifice in the secret places of the will. And all these know the strange, mysterious exaltation of sacrifice, how it raises man above himself. And to these must we not add those who remained behind because they could not go, and whose work was simply to wait for whatever news might come, when the waiting was itself 'faithfulness unto death.' Were not all faithful unto death—in literal deed, in will and willingness, in the love and longing which constitute a death of the heart that suffers ?

For we may extend the meaning of the words, 'faithful unto death,' far beyond their common usage. St. John was thinking of Christians in Smyrna who were about to be cast into prison,

and who would probably issue thence only to execution. And we this day are thinking of men who laid down life in war. Both were faithful unto literal death, in that sudden, violent, and even dramatic way which seizes the imagination strongly. Yet I am sure that even those who have given life in war or martyrdom would desire to have joined with them all who, in their own different ways, have been thus stedfast—a great company which no man can number. For we should bless God that even in the paths of common life He does not deny the humblest of His children this same opportunity of being 'faithful unto death' in the simple, ordinary course of nature. Do you not remember one after another whose life is truly summed up in those three words? They fought in no great war, save that which never ceases—the war against *un*faithfulness: a father who worked on for wife and children until he lay down for his long rest; a mother, perhaps a widow, who was faithful to the children left her to rear, working day in, day out, until strength failed. Were it not for the multitude of souls thus faithful, the world would break down and perish. There is not a single soldier who would not feel that such as these were his fellow-soldiers in a still greater war, and that, while his warfare lasted a few years, theirs lasted a lifetime—mostly unrecognised, the cross without the crown, or so it seems. But St. John himself compels us to recognise this form of stedfastness. His friend Peter, his brother James, and many others of the Apostolic band were faithful

unto death by literal martyrdom, as their Master was. But John lingered out his life to bloodless old age, and died by nature's law. Is, then, his exile in Patmos, the hard labour to which he was condemned, his service towards these Churches, his long-drawn-out anxiety for them, the sword ever hanging over his head—are not these a sufficient test of faithfulness to death? And so with multitudes ever since, to whom all life is one long faithfulness—fidelity to friends, to country, to kindred, to the different tasks laid upon them, to ideals of right—and fidelity to these is what God regards as, in its own form and measure, faithfulness to Himself. It is good for us to associate all faithful souls in the walks of ordinary peaceful life with the men who gave their lives in the Great War.

And now we come to the true comfort, 'I will give thee the crown of life.' What God cares for most is a trustworthiness which no labour outwearies, no discouragement breaks down, no danger turns to cowardice—on which God Himself can rely. He is the faithful Creator. Christ is the faithful and true Witness. It is this faithfulness on which God relies for the work of the great world beyond, and which this world is testing from birth to death by the ordinary trials of daily life, by sudden and dangerous emergencies like war which call our manhood and womanhood to prove of what fibre they are made. It is this quality of faithfulness on which God relies for the men who are fit to carry on the world which is eternal.

People ask if the souls of such men survive. Do we imagine that God tests such souls by every trial, even unto death, only in order to fling away like a weed that so dearly bought faithfulness? It is the very thing He needs for whatever kingdom He is building out yonder in the heavens. And this is why He gives the crown of life to those who can give life away in faithfulness which endures even unto death. If a soul cannot be faithful, it can only live for itself; and, living for itself, it narrows and narrows and all its powers of life dwindle, so that it is literally true that he that saveth his life loseth it. But the opposite process goes on in faithfulness—in the power to live for something greater than one's self. As one gives one's self away the personality widens out into the greater object of its faith. In other words, the volume and power of life increase, until life at its highest is reached. The crown is not something different added to life: it is life itself growing to its divine fullness until the soul lives itself out into all the life of God, into all in which God lives His life. The crown of life is life more abundant.

Therefore we can think with calmness and certainty of those who have been thus faithful in either peace or war. God can no more disown them than He can disown Himself. Their fidelity is dear to Him. It is part of His own fidelity. He has great work for it to do somewhere in His universe. They are not dead—they are more living than they were here—they are more living than we are. All that we need be anxious about is that

we ourselves be not unfaithful to the noble dead. We have set on our Memorial Tablet the words, 'Their name liveth unto all generations.' We are the first of those generations, and therefore on us first falls the duty of handing on their name ; and there is no way of doing this but that of being, like them, faithful unto death. Thank God, whether in peace or war, that faithfulness is open to every soul of man !

Earth—the Broken Image of Heaven

'The life which is life indeed.'—1 TIMOTHY vi. 19 (Revised Version).

I WISH to speak this morning of Heaven—a subject of which Scripture tells us little. Of its existence it gives us the amplest assurance; but of its place, its circumstances, the forms and details of its life and joys and activities, it is strangely silent. It throws us back on ourselves to form what conception of Heaven we can.

Now, we can take two methods. First, we may picture Heaven as entirely different from earth. This was the way of monks and hermits in old times. From their conception of religion they could think no otherwise. 'The religious life' meant for them the exact opposite of the ordinary natural life of earth. The human body was evil—hence to mortify it by austerities was the best preparation for a happier world. The family, society, the world, its possessions and business: all were temptations, and the nearest approach to Heaven on earth was to divest one's self of every one of them.

True, we do not now abandon earth for desert solitudes. Nevertheless, in the midst of wider ideas of Heaven, does not the fear at times still

haunt us that when we die we shall pass out into a world all strange and new and different.

Now, the mediæval way of exalting Heaven by making little of earth is certainly not Scriptural. Scripture takes whatever is great, good, and noble here on earth, raises them to their highest and best, and then says that Heaven is all this made wider, greater, more infinite.

See how John in Revelation gathers together all beautiful and precious things of earth, and from them constructs the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem: precious stones with their fair colours, and pure gold like unto transparent glass; a river of living water, clear as crystal; a garden of trees of everlasting fruitfulness; light beyond sun and moon; music, the song of Moses and the Lamb, and harpers harping with their harps. See how he gathers all these to make a picture of Heaven—not despising them because they are earthly, but making them an image of heavenly things.

And to-day I wish to show, if possible, that we can get a true and noble conception of Heaven out of earthly things: not indeed gold and precious stones and crystal waters, but the common life and experience through which we pass. Take these common things of earth—look at them not in their lowest, but as they appear to you in your hours of greatest spiritual purity—and you cannot help feeling that these very things are Heaven; that it is round about you, that you are in it now, that you walk through it every day.

Take this earth itself. Have you ever really

seen this earth? Have you ever felt the something that lies beyond all forms and colours of field or sea or sky—that lies deeper than the knife of the keenest science can ever lay bare? It comes to us only in rare and radiant moments when the world within us is laid asleep—when sin is beneath our feet—when the soul is pure in its most secret longings:

> 'The memory like a cloudless air,
> The conscience as a sea at rest.'

And then, for a moment the very heart of this solid earth opens and reveals itself; God is in it all to the last blade of grass. His thought, His power, His will, His love flow through it like a river of eternal life.

And now imagine this blessed mood made eternal—no passing momentary glimpse, but the constant vision of Eternity. To see God in all His works—in this earth with which we are so familiar, and on from star to star, and sun to sun, and system to system, for ever and ever. No painful guessing of the meaning of it all, but direct, immediate vision. Would not this be part of Heaven itself—the vision of God's handiwork which comes only once or twice in moments of rare spiritual purity, made constant, abiding, eternal?

Or take the ties of family which bind us together on earth. Some have said that these cannot exist in Heaven. But now, in your highest, most spiritual moments, what is it that you really see in those nearest and dearest to you? It is certainly not

flesh and blood—it is not their circumstances of poverty of wealth—it is not even their knowledge or intellectual power. It is really their souls, their essence as spiritual beings who came forth from the Eternal Spirit and to Him return. You look into your child's eyes: he is your own flesh and blood, but in such moments the very body fades away—you see the mysterious thing we call soul, the spirit that came to you out of the invisible, that is meant to find its joy in the Eternal Spirit Himself.

How strangely precious the soul grows in that deep momentary glimpse! And now, be quite sure that in that momentary glimpse you really saw into Heaven itself. Precisely that direct vision of your soul into the soul of another is the relation of spirit to spirit in that great life which is life indeed—seeing nothing, caring for nothing but heart for heart, soul for soul; feeling the flash of spiritual thought, emotion, will, from one to another directly and immediately, yet surely with some tender memory of earthly kinship: this is Heaven. In rare and gracious moments we have it here; but there for ever and for ever.

And now, widen your thought to the great race of mankind. Pascal calls man 'the glory and the shame of the universe,' and to most of us come hours when the whole human race with all its long history and manifold activities seems no better than an ant-hill with its swarming crowds. Be certain that these were not our best and truest hours. Far better, far truer, were the rare moments when the thought of our race rose like a great tide and

flooded all the heart, partly with pride, partly with shame, partly with a great longing—pride of its glorious achievements, shame for its degradation, and a great longing for its redemption. What dreams men in all ages have had of some glorious society of noble men and women, freed from the tyranny and sorrow of sin, spending their energies freely in the service of one another—bound together in peace and love! Prophets, apostles, martyrs have dreamed of it, lived for it, died for it. Even to commonplace men and women like ourselves it may have been given to catch one glimpse of what it would be—a race redeemed, a world of love.

In that glimpse you saw the very thing which constitutes Heaven. For what is Heaven but just that world of love—that great society of spirits of just men made perfect, all spending their energies, redeemed from sin and selfishness, in each other's service? For one moment we caught a glimpse of it here in the ordinary men and women around us; but there that glimpse is the eternal reality. And the beginning of it is here and now, in every act of love which makes the world better.

Come back from the race to ourselves and our familiar every-day work, for there too we must learn what Heaven is. I can almost imagine the dismay with which some of you hear these words. We think of our daily toil, its monotony and fatigue; and perhaps our chief thought of Heaven is just that there we will have time to rest; time to sit in the eternal sunshine without feeling that some duty is neglected, or the means of life unearned.

This feeling is only too natural in thousands of weary workers. It rises partly, perhaps, through physical weakness, or because our work is uncongenial, and partly, or even chiefly perhaps, because our will has never been in true harmony with the will of God. We have never learnt to do all things for His sake. But have we been so unblest that we have never even for a day known what it is to do our work with joy—entering into its best meaning and purpose, doing it for the sake of one we loved? If we have ever had such a day of work, how easy it was, how it lifted us nobly above weariness, irksomeness, and monotony!

And now imagine that day lengthened into eternity: every power for ever at its best, our whole nature entering into God's great purpose, and sustained by the strength of love. Surely that is Heaven—*not* the flinging aside for ever of work as a hateful earthly task; but that earthly task adapting itself to new conditions, with wider scope, nobler powers, and purer love. Believe me, it is not in despising our earthly work that we get the true conception of Heaven: it is in making it great, noble, heavenly.

And now, take one last example—the one which includes all the rest: God Himself. We think of Heaven as where He is—somewhere far above this low earth of ours. But think what God may mean to us even on earth. At first, perhaps, we can find His presence only in certain special things, or places, or times. God seems nearer to us when

we see the Communion bread and wine; or in church; or on Sunday. Also, at first, God may seem to us a form of fear; a threatening of law; a darkness on the sunshine. We gladly forget Him—or remember Him only for fear of something happening to us here or elsewhere. The present carelessness towards religion is much in the nature of a revolt against this idea of fear which dominated past generations.

Clearly this thought of God can never be Heaven. But suppose your life progresses in noble and faithful ways. Gradually the whole conception of Him changes. How close He becomes!—no God who reveals Himself only in special times, places, things, but in everything. No form of terror, but the sunshine that warms us, the air we breathe, the bread by which we live. What a world this becomes at last when a man lives and moves and has his being consciously in God—when he cannot look at man, woman, or child, the field beneath, the sky above, without feeling the presence of the Great Companion, the Spirit who is the life of all that is. And there come still greater experiences—moments when some veil seems to fall, and round the spirit of man glows and burns the Eternal Spirit with revelations which it is not possible for a man to utter.

How great a thing it is for mortal man thus to

> 'Gaze one moment on the Face Whose beauty
> Wakes the world's great hymn;
> Feel it one unutterable moment,
> Bent in love o'er him:

In that look feel heaven, earth, men, and angels,
Distant grow, and dim ;
In that look feel heaven, earth, men, and angels,
Nearer grow through Him.'

Mrs. Rundle Charles.

Remember all this is possible even here on earth : in our highest spiritual moments we know God in this direct, immediate way. And Heaven is but the rare and vanishing moment of earthly vision and communion made eternal—to live for ever as near God there as we do here for an instant.

It is not by making little of earth, but by making much of it, that the true conception of Heaven comes. Earth, our friends, mankind, work, God Himself : all must be seen in their deepest, truest meaning in some high hour of spiritual insight—and that deepest, truest meaning is Heaven.

These moments of vision *are* 'the life which is life indeed.' They do not come to us when the earth seems dull and uninteresting ; when we see our friends as mortal rather than immortal beings ; when the race of men is to us contemptible, our work a weariness and burden, God a vague presence of fear. 'The life which is life indeed' comes when all of these are seen and felt in their inmost spiritual essence—and the continuation of that in more perfect form is Heaven.

'Le débonnaire Jésus a passé par là'

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'—
1 Cor. xvi. 23.

We hear these words of benediction so often that perhaps the very frequency hinders us from attaching any special meaning to them. If we give any meaning to the word 'grace,' it is a theological one —true enough in itself, but somewhat cold and distant; not the dear, tender grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the grave, sweet smile, the lips, the eyes, the charm of manner which melt the heart with love and longing. I looked up the word 'grace' in a Bible dictionary. I found 'ample knowledge,' 'scholarship,' 'theological understanding'; but not Himself, not the gracious Face.

And so we must turn to Christ and try to see what grace is when it clothes itself in physical form, when it goes about doing good, when it feeds the hungry and heals the sick, when it lays down life for the unworthy.

Grace is, in its very nature, a unity. Nevertheless it is made up of elements, which can be separated for the moment in our thought. And the first element of the grace of our Lord, and of all true grace, is a certain tenderness and pity toward the human race in its frailty and sorrow and suffering.

Without this compassion as an abiding habit of the heart, I do not think grace is possible. For there is a strange and poignant pathos in man as he appears on this earth. He comes without his consent, he knows not whence. He is born in weakness and ignorance. He is shot at by the arrows of chance and fortune, disease and suffering, hunger, toil, and weariness. He stands on a narrow 'bank and shoal of time,' facing the mystery of the all-encompassing Eternity, seeing his dearest swept into the darkness, knowing that soon he also will be swept into it. If any man can contemplate this universal frailty, the suffering, sorrow, ignorance of this short-lived creature, and find in it nothing of pathos, nothing to call forth a great and abiding pity as for a suffering, beaten child, he is incapable of grace.

Yet compassion alone is not in itself grace. Poets often have it, and hear 'the still, sad music of humanity.' It is this 'sense of tears in mortal things' which creates all tragic poetry—the feeling that mortal man struggles hopelessly with immortal powers. But grace does more than make a picture and poem of human frailty. It seeks to help it, to turn it into strength. Nothing is more arresting in the Old Testament than the way in which the compassion of God broods over the frail creature He has called into existence—the weakness of his frame, the dust that returns to the dust, the beauty that withers like a flower and is consumed like the moth, the ignorance and waywardness as of foolish children: again and again God is shown bending

in pity over the pathetic spectacle. And then we turn to Him who is God's visible image—is it not the same? He had compassion on the multitude—on their hunger, their ignorance, their diseases and sufferings and death. He fed them, healed them, taught them, raised their dead—laid the power of His life on their weakness in compassion, in pity, in tender and kindly helpfulness.

And so when we pray that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us, this is part of what we ought to mean—that we have the same sense of human frailty, the same tender compassion for it, the same kindly and gracious power of giving ourselves to its relief and aid. It is a great prayer when truly prayed.

And yet there is a greater. Pity for suffering is, by comparison, easy. To have compassion for sinners is a much harder attainment. We take up various attitudes towards sin. Some deny its existence—sin is 'good in the making.' The law takes no heed of it until it breaks forth into crime. Novelists and dramatists work it up as material for their art. The genial man of the world shrugs his shoulders, smiles, and takes for granted that men must have their little frailties, as he has his. In all this there may be no compassion, no effort to help and save.

Now turn to Jesus Christ. No one ever saw sin with clearer eyes—its nature and its deadly power. His very purity gave Him an almost miraculous insight. He distinguished two species of it—sins of the flesh, as in 'publicans and sinners'; and

sins of the spirit, as in the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. And He had compassion upon both, and sought to save both. We know how sinners of the first kind responded to His gracious kindness—the poor outcasts gathering themselves round this one Man of pure heart and life, who stooped to mingle with them, impure. Nay, even to the self-righteous Pharisees He showed an equal grace. Contrast Him with His forerunner, the Baptist. John met the Pharisees at the very outset with the defiance: 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' Jesus at the end of His life, when the Pharisees were plotting His death, spoke like words of denunciation against them—but only at the end. Up to then, He did His best to win them. Think of the grace shown to the Pharisees in representing them as the elder son in the parable. When the elder brother protested against the welcome given to the prodigal, the father says: 'Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.' So long as there was one chance left of winning them over, Jesus would not break with them, would not finally denounce them.

And all this is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—the great compassion of a pure heart for the impure and sinful; a compassion which will not allow the greatest moral unworthiness to stand between it and those who need salvation; a pity which will go to the last verge of love to redeem the worst. We know how far it went—this Communion Table tells us. And this is the grace of

our Lord Jesus Christ for which we pray—this compassion for sinful men and women, this humble stooping to save them, this willingness to suffer for their good. Truly, it is a great prayer. How many of us really dare to pray it in spirit and in truth?

Let us turn to another meaning of grace, which yet is involved in what I have already said. You know that grace means a certain kind of beauty which we call charm—charm of face, or of manners, or of bearing, or of character, or of all of them together. When we say that a person is graceful, it is this charm of which we think.

Now, was this beauty, or anything corresponding to it, part of the grace of our Lord? Do not think the question trivial or unimportant. There must be some essential correspondence between the soul and the body it inhabits—and the body of our Lord passed into the heavens. Two views of His personal appearance have been held. One is based on words which might, indeed, be applicable to the marred form on the Cross: 'His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. . . . He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.' In accordance with these words, there are pictures of our Lord in foreign churches, dark, forbidding, almost repulsive. But other words of Scripture were applied to Christ. 'Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips.' 'He is altogether lovely.'

These words prevailed. A certain type of face has become familiar to all of us in Art, as the type of our Lord's—grave and tender, and with a certain beauty which we may call gracious. Some think it is the type handed down by tradition from those who were His companions. One thing seems to me sure. The connection between soul and body is very close. Sooner or later a truly gracious and beautiful soul moulds the face into its own beauty. We have all seen this grace, this charm—in the lines and expression of the face, the light of the eye, the charm of manner which comes only from a spirit of love within. We cannot for a moment suppose that Jesus Christ had nothing of this beauty of face and form and manner. Is it possible that the inner grace of compassion for the weak, the suffering, the sinful—compassion so compelling that it bowed His head in death for their salvation—is it possible that this grace of the soul never burnt its way out through the body, never shone with heavenly light in the eye, gave a more tender curve to the lips when they smiled, or imparted to the whole bearing a winsomeness which drew many as by an instinctive charm? It was this, surely, that gathered round Him the poor publicans and sinners; this that made the mothers bring their babes, and the babes climb on His knee and nestle on that gracious breast. The grace within—the gracious, kindly, compassionate heart that folded in its embrace all the children of sorrow and of sin, and at last broke to save them—shone through the whole Man for those who had eyes to see it, all

humble and childlike souls. Apart from the outward visible grace which our eyes cannot see, the gracious beauty of it all should awaken whatever of good is in us. I often think of Christ beside us all the time, a Friend Who is hurt by our neglect as a human friend is hurt, but with much more intensity of feeling. Why are we, then, so ungracious towards His grace? And when we pray that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us, we ask that we be folded into that infinite compassion for the weak and the sinful, which asks no question as to our worthiness, which sees nothing but our need, which will stoop from heaven's height to the lowest parts of the earth, to shame, agony, and death for every man however unworthy. We ask that this unspeakable grace may fold us in, may never leave us, may redeem us from all suffering, from all sin. We ask that this same grace may so take possession of our whole being that we may have Christ's own pity for human sorrow, Christ's own compassion on the erring, Christ's own willingness to do and suffer for their sakes; and that this inner grace may shine through our very faces, our manner, our whole bearing, imparting a new beauty, a new charm, even to the poor perishable dust. Are we prepared to pray this prayer? If it were granted us, it might drive us even unto death for the sake of others, as it did Him.

Alas! how far away we are from this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, within and without! Well for us that His grace does not hang on anything we are. But nothing less than this is what it aims at:

to impart itself, to give grace for grace. Let us never forget that all this is what we pray for in the Benediction which you stand to receive every Sabbath day : 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'